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**Becoming the Vanguard:
Children, the Young Pioneers, and the Soviet State
in the Great Patriotic War**

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in the Great Patriotic War**

by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2009

To my own precious children,

Will, Reece, and Rhynn,

who have dramatically influenced the way I see the children of history.

Acknowledgements

This project reached a successful conclusion only because of the advice, support, and encouragement of countless people – mentors, colleagues, friends, and family. To offer thanks here seems inadequate, yet supremely necessary.

First and foremost, I must thank my kind and long-suffering advisor, Charters Wynn, for his gentle prodding, incisive comments, and meticulous editing. During the research and writing of this dissertation, Dr. Wynn waited patiently while I welcomed one child . . . and then another . . . and then one more. For his willingness to support rather than criticize my decision to grow a family AND hold a full-time lecturer position AND write a dissertation, I will be forever grateful. His example, as both brilliant scholar and superb human being, is inspirational to me (and countless others).

I am thankful to the members of my dissertation committee for their insightful and helpful comments well as their enthusiastic reception of this project. My sincere thanks to Joan Neuberger, David Crew, Judy Coffin, and Tom Garza.

For the past eight years, I have been fortunate to have a “second home” in the Baylor University history department. No one could ask for better colleagues or a more nurturing atmosphere in which to work. I am grateful to all of my Russian history students for honing my knowledge, helping test my theories, and serving as a constant reminder why I *love* being in academia. Thanks to Michael Long for friendship, support, and answering panicky Russian language questions. Thanks also to Helen McEwen for her invaluable help in the process of translating what felt like a mountain of documents. Finally, a special, heartfelt thank you to my fellow laborers in the Gulag Archicubicle, David Smith, Dan Greene, Tom Riley, and honorary member, Kimberly Kellison. Anyone writing (or not writing) a dissertation should covet the daily doses of laughter, encouraging words, kolaches (and other healthy food), friendship, and intellectual stimulation I so fortunately received and continue to receive from them. I plan to spend the next several years returning the favor!

Thanks are due to Arch Getty and Praxis International for their phenomenal support of a young, inexperienced researcher in Moscow, and to the University of Texas at Austin’s Department of History for financial support of this dissertation process by way of the Sheffield Fellowship and the John Paul Jones Research fund. Thanks, too, are due to the staff of the Center for Preservation of Documents of Youth Organizations (TsKhDMO) in Moscow for their hospitality and helpfulness over the years.

Two special individuals were an integral part of my experience in crafting this dissertation. First, I am grateful to Wallace Daniel for instigating my love of Russian history as a Baylor sophomore. His enthusiasm for Russia, history, and scholarship was contagious and life-changing. Second, I am enormously indebted to the head of the reading room at TsKhDMO, Galina Mikhailovna Tokareva, for her aid and friendship. She was herself a child of the Great Patriotic War, and has been gracious enough to share her experiences and her home with me. It was her story that affirmed my interest in children in Russia, and it is her story that continues to inspire me.

Last but not least (to coin a phrase), I owe an unredeemable amount of gratitude to my family for their constant love and belief in me. My parents, William and Lucy Burris, share this degree with me. My wonderful, caring extended family and family-in-law have provided just the right amounts of encouragement and expectation. Finally, no amount of words could adequately express the hundreds of ways that my husband, William, contributed to the successful completion of this dissertation. I am so thankful for his support of my stint as professional student, and thankful, too, that he supported my need to set aside academic work – often – in favor of family life, church, and community service. Will, Reece, and Rhynn, who all arrived at various points of the dissertating experience, are a continual source of happiness, wonder, and joy. Their presence in my life enriches all that I do.

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2009

Supervisor: Charters S. Wynn

This dissertation combines institutional history and social analysis to provide a more nuanced depiction of the Soviet experience in the Great Patriotic War, a portrait which considers the experience of children, the state's expectations of children, and an exploration of the institution responsible for connecting child and state, the V.I. Lenin All-Union Pioneer Organization. It argues that the state's expectations for children during the Great Patriotic War were issued primarily in order to save the floundering Young Pioneer organization. Though the Pioneers were supposed to lead children in all sorts of tasks and behaviors – a role they had fulfilled since their inception in 1922 – the organization nearly collapsed under the strain of wartime conditions in the early years of the war.

In order to resurrect its image and secure its rightful place in the vanguard of children, the Pioneers launched a concerted effort to reassert its leadership. Language, values, and models of heroism were revamped to more accurately reflect the war. The internalization of these standards by children supported the Pioneers' claim to leadership. Campaigns of action were launched to allow the Pioneers to claim ownership of children's accomplishments. To guarantee success, the organization drew its ideas from preexisting activities – activities children were already doing in 1941-42, largely on local initiative. What had been conceived of and run as a *prescriptive* organization for two decades became a *descriptive* organization, subsuming all appropriate acts into the task of reestablishing the Pioneers at the forefront of Soviet childhood. This suggests that children had far more agency than previously assumed, and their many roles complicate the typical “child-victim” normally associated with the Great Patriotic War and its propaganda.

The post-Stalingrad turnaround allowed the Pioneers the opportunity to reassert themselves. Becoming the vanguard, the organization established the foundations for a Pioneer-led heroism storied in Soviet history. Though internal problems continued to dog the Pioneers for years, the foundational story was established in the latter years of the war. Beginning in 1943, the organization began writing itself into the post-war victory narrative, alleging successful leadership among children and ignoring the near-catastrophe they had averted.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On June 22, 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet Union, nullifying a tenuous pact between the two nations and launching four years of death and destruction. Physically, mentally, and spiritually consumed by this desperate struggle, the Soviet people endured unbelievable hardship. Some might surmise that they were hardly strangers to adversity, that any semblance of “normalcy” had been forever disrupted two-and-a-half decades before by the Bolsheviks’ seizure of power in the October Revolution of 1917. Clearly, Lenin and the Bolsheviks intended to destroy the old order in order to replace it with a new socialist society. The dissolution of the Congress of Soviets and sanctioned land seizure by the peasantry marked the initial stages of this transformation. From the beginning, the campaign to build a socialist nation was quite often accompanied by violence toward property and persons: the political police, the Cheka, executed the royal family; church property was desecrated and priests arrested; the state confiscated private homes and subdivided them into communal apartments. Other efforts – the attack on the Orthodox Church, changes to the education system, and so on – proceeded a bit more gradually, developing in earnest after the Civil War victory solidified the Bolsheviks’ hold on power. Beginning in the late 1920s, Stalin’s two-pronged drive to collectivize and

industrialize created social and physical upheaval, dramatically influencing the lives of millions. Collectivization encouraged persecution of alleged kulaks and, ultimately, created conditions for a famine of unprecedented proportions. Industrialization often placed workers in unsafe, unsanitary, and ill-planned conditions. Political persecution – both within the Party and without – was a constant feature of life, culminating (but not ending) with the Great Terror of the late 1930s. Millions suffered at the hands of the NKVD in prisons or penal colonies.

Even with such a history, however, the invasion of Germany in 1941 visited remarkable levels of privation and disruption upon a Soviet population somewhat inured to suffering. The reaction of the Soviet people to this hardship – the ability to survive, to defend themselves, to resist annihilation – is a key factor in the victory of the Soviet Union (and, thus, the Allies) in the Great Patriotic War.¹ The military and political strategies of the Great Patriotic War have been and continue to be examined in detail,² historians have only recently begun

¹ I choose to use the phrase “Great Patriotic War” intentionally throughout this dissertation. While “World War II” is the more common term in the West, “Great Patriotic War” is a more precise term for the portion of the conflict involving the Soviet Union. Not only is this the term used within the former Soviet Union (*Velikaia Otechestvennaia Voina*), but it refers to the specific chronological boundaries of June 22, 1941, to September 2, 1945.

² See, for example, Emelianov, Iurii Vasilevich, *Tragediia Stalina, 1941-1945: cherez porazhenie k pobede* (Moskva: IAuza, Eksmo, 2006); Vladimir Lota, *Sekretnyi front General'nogo shtaba* (Moskva: Molodaia Gvardiia, 2005); David E. Murphy, *What Stalin Knew: The Enigma of Barbarossa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); David M. Glantz, *Soviet Operational and Tactical Combat in Manchuria, 1945: August Storm* (London: Frank Cass, 2003) and *The Battle for Leningrad, 1941-1944* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2002); Richard Overy, *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet War Effort: 1941-1945* (New York, NY:

delving into the experiences and meaning of the *people's* war. As Bernd Bonwetsch and Robert Thurston correctly note, the term “people” should not refer to that monolith of absolute heroism so long idealized by Soviet historians and the Soviet state, but to the complex and often contradictory combination of good, bad, and ugly that characterized ordinary people in wartime.³ From the quotidian to the heroic, the war influenced all aspects of daily life for millions of ordinary Soviets. Good work has helped to begin fleshing out the wartime experiences of sub-groups such as women in the military, frontline soldiers, and urban intellectuals.⁴ This dissertation seeks to contribute to this historiography by

Penguin Books, 1997), James Barros and Richard Gregor, *Double Deception: Stalin, Hitler, and the Invasion of Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), John Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad: Stalin's War with Germany* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1975), and *The Road to Berlin: Continuing the History of Stalin's War with Germany* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983).

³ Bonwetsch and Thurston, eds., *The People's War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 1-9.

⁴ On women, see Kazimiera J. Cottam, *Women in Air War: The Eastern Front of World War II* (Nepean, OH: New Military Publishing, 1997); John Erickson, “Soviet Women at War” in *World War II and the Soviet People: Selected Papers from the Fourth World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies, Harrogate 1990*, eds. John Garrard and Carol Garrard (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993); Reina Pennington, *Wings, Women, and War: Soviet Airwomen in World War II Combat* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001); Susanne Conze and Beate Fiesler, “Soviet Women as Comrades-in-Arms: A Blind Spot in the History of the War” in Bonwetsch and Thurston, *The People's War*, 211-234. On ordinary soldiers, see Conze and Fiesler; Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); Robert Thurston, “Cauldrons of Loyalty and Betrayal: Soviet Soldiers' Behavior, 1941 and 1945” and Mark Von Hagen, “Soviet Soldiers and Officers on the Eve of the German Invasion: Toward a Description of Social Psychology and Political Attitudes,” both in Bonwetsch and Thurston, *The People's War*, 235-258 and 187-210. On intellectuals, see Bonwetsch, “War as a ‘Breathing Space’: Soviet Intellectuals and the ‘Great Patriotic War’”; Aileen G. Rambow, “The Siege of Leningrad: Wartime Literature and Ideological Change”; and Richard Stites, “Soviet Russian Wartime Culture: Freedom and Control, Spontaneity and Consciousness,” all in Bonwetsch and Thurston, *The People's War*, 137-186.

aiming to more fully illuminate the experiences of a heretofore neglected sector of the population: children.

Children are often absent from the studies and narratives historians craft. They are invisible, perhaps, because of their seeming non-presence in political debate, social activism, or military action. Children do not “make things happen” in the financial world, elevate “great men,” or command armies. To ignore the story of children, however, is to willingly accept an incomplete picture of past events. Their very ubiquity demands notice, as does their role in various aspects of society - the family, education, the labor force, and so on. Building on the foundational work of Philippe Ariès,⁵ historians have revealed the presence and influence of children, of representations of children, and of the cultural construct of childhood in varying arenas such as consumer culture, class structures, and identity formation.⁶ Bringing children into the stories of history gives a fuller understanding of events and ideas; the ways in which children are represented,

⁵ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962). By “foundational,” I mean that Ariès successfully argued for an examination of children as a separate group in society by revealing childhood to be a cultural construct. The Ariès thesis asserts that the idea of childhood, invented in the Early Modern period, limited the freedom of children and established the tyranny of the family. Not all historians agree with his thesis - see Lloyd deMause, *The History of Childhood* (New York: The Psychohistory Press, 1974), for the most obvious example – but all have built upon the idea that children deserve to be examined as an important and distinct sub-group in modern society.

⁶ See, for example, Sharon Stephens, ed., *Children and the Politics of Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Caroline F. Levander and Carol J. Singley, eds., *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Hugh Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor in England: Representation of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996); Roger Cox, *Shaping Childhood: Themes of Uncertainty in the History of Adult-Child Relationships* (London: Routledge, 1996); Elliot West, *Growing Up with the Country: Childhood on the Far Western Frontier* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1989).

legislated, ritualized, organized, mistreated, and so on reveal much about the adult society and culture with which they cohabit. Children, too, are affected by these perceptions about childhood; their point of view allows us to see events differently, to hear new voices.

The majority of projects on children have focused on the West, and, in particular, on the United States. Much work remains to be done in the field of Russian history. Max Okenfuss traces what he believes to be the origin of the idea of childhood in Russia to the seventeenth century's Slavic primer,⁷ though Andrew Wachtel argues that the 1852 publication of Leo Tolstoy's *Childhood* marks the "coherent integral model for expression and interpretation of this stage," contrasting Tolstoy's model to the utopian vision of Chernyshevsky.⁸ Aside from these studies of the idea of childhood in Russia, little has been done, especially on the relationship of these ideas to children themselves, to the state, or to material culture.⁹ Marxist and, later, Leninist ideas about children and childhood are, of course, essential to understanding Bolshevik attitudes, both ideological and practical, toward day care, education, youth organizations, the family, and proper upbringing (*vospitanie*) of the young.

⁷ Max Okenfuss, *The Discovery of Childhood in Russia: The Evidence of the Slavic Primer* (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1980).

⁸ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood: Creation of a Russian Myth* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 2.

⁹ Two notable exceptions exist: Catriona Kelly's forthcoming and much-anticipated work on children and material culture in Russia/the Soviet Union, and David Ransel, *Mothers of Misery: Child Abandonment in Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

The field is almost limitless in Soviet history. Fewer than ten English-language monographs directly address children and/or childhood in the Soviet Union, though there are more that touch on issues affecting children such as education or women.¹⁰ Felicity O'Dell and Katerina Clark investigate the uses and meanings of Soviet literature for children.¹¹ More recent works explore interactions between society, state, and children. Two scholars consider the issue of children's homes: Alan Ball describes conditions of abandoned children and the state's efforts to deal with them in the 1920s, and Judith Harwin examines state-sponsored child care in the late Soviet period.¹² Lisa Kirschenbaum focuses on preschool children, "trac[ing] the shifting and contested meanings of childhood in revolutionary Russia as well as the consequences of the child's status as the personification of the whole enterprise of cultural revolution for teachers, parents, and children themselves."¹³ Her study of pedagogical policies for kindergarteners affirms the ideological importance of children's malleability for the Bolsheviks, yet demonstrates that practical resources often lagged behind theoretical concerns.

¹⁰ See, for example, Larry Holmes, *Stalin's School: Moscow's Model School No. 25, 1931-1937* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), and *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse: Reforming Education in Soviet Russia, 1917-1931* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991); Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹¹ Felicity O'Dell, *Socialisation Through Children's Literature: the Soviet Example* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

¹² Alan Ball, *And Now My Soul Is Hardened: Abandoned Children in Soviet Russia, 1918-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Judith Harwin, *Children of the Russian State, 1917-1995* (Aldershot, England: Avebury, 1996). Harwin's book focuses primarily on the Gorbachev-Yeltsin years despite the book's title.

¹³ Lisa Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2001), 2.

Soviet youth have been considered in greater depth and breadth.

Beginning with Ralph T. Fisher's landmark study of the Communist Youth League, or Komsomol, many scholars have examined the relationship of youth to twentieth-century events in the Soviet Union.¹⁴ The term "youth" introduces a somewhat problematic semantic issue. The dividing line between child and youth is rather murky: when exactly does childhood end and youth begin? At what point does adulthood arrive? Do these categories overlap? Clearly, there is a greater expectation of independence, maturity, and physical development as age progresses, but these factors vary wildly from individual to individual – much less culture to culture and era to era – as do evolving expectations. For the sake of clarity and given the centrality of the Pioneer organization to this project, this dissertation will use the artificial limits imposed by the Communist Party to designate between children and youth. The term "youth" (*molodëzh* ') will be those persons able to apply for membership in the Komsomol – young men and women ages fifteen to twenty-six. The terms "children" or "schoolchildren" (*deti* or *shkol'niki*) will be used to describe both those ten- to fourteen-year old boys

¹⁴ Ralph T. Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth: A Study of the Congresses of the Komsomol, 1918-1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). Other monographs on Soviet youth include Anne E. Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), and *Flappers and Foxtrotters: Soviet Youth in the "Roaring Twenties"* (Pittsburgh, PA: Center for Russian and East European Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 1994); Albert Hughes, *Political Socialization of Soviet Youth* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992); James Riordan, ed., *Soviet Youth Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989); Isabel Tirado, *Young Guard! The Communist Youth League, Petrograd, 1917-1920* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988); Allen Kassof, *The Soviet Youth Program: Regimentation and Rebellion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

and girls able to apply for membership in the Young Pioneers and those younger children still of school age.¹⁵ Since the political organization, accompanying messages, and state expectations changed at age fifteen, it makes sense to adopt the Party's distinction between children and youth for the purposes of this dissertation.

Acknowledging the “importance but also the separateness of youth,”¹⁶ the Bolsheviks created organizations designed to disseminate party messages and to regulate activism among them, a sort of mass mobilization borne out of twentieth-century modernity.¹⁷ The Communist Youth League, for youth ages fifteen to approximately twenty-six, was a group for Communist Party hopefuls, populated by those with proper backgrounds, suitable recommendations and connections, and outstanding grades and achievements. The organization was viewed as a stepping stone to party candidacy, a good job or university placement, and future security, offering a fine combination of idealism and opportunism. Members of the Komsomol were the most visible and vocal of the younger generation: Komsomoltsy participated in partisan warfare during the Great Patriotic War, Komsomoltsy tilled the Virgin Lands for Khrushchev, and Komsomoltsy manned

¹⁵ Soviet children began school around age six. A party organization for children ages six to nine, the Little Octobrists, existed, though it was largely inactive during the period of the war.

¹⁶ Peter Stearns, *Growing Up: The History of Childhood in a Global Context* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 58. Stearns suggests that “the Marxist approach to children” demonstrated a “fervent dedication to the formation of youth groups.”

¹⁷ Claire Wallace and Raimund Alt, “Youth Cultures Under Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of the Swings Against the Nazis,” *Youth and Society*, 32, 3 (March 2001), 292.

huge construction projects such as the Baikal-Amur Mainline railway. Youth, indeed, were targeted by the Party as a special sub-population and “organized” accordingly.

But it was children, not youth, who occupied a “privileged place in the Soviet way of life.”¹⁸ Central to cultural transformation, the child “stood as the icon of the Revolution’s future,”¹⁹ “impress[ing] all who ever go to the Soviet Union.”²⁰ A popular state slogan declared children to be the only privileged class in the Soviet Union. Not content to allow these icons to absorb socialist ideals by osmosis, the party created an organization for them as well: the Young Pioneers.

Who were these Young Pioneers? The V. I. Lenin All-Union Pioneer Organization was the Bolshevik (later, Communist) Party’s organization for children ages ten to fourteen.²¹ In 1922, after five years of experimentation and debate, the Fifth All-Russian Congress of the Komsomol announced the official installation of the Young Pioneers, a thinly-disguised communist version of the

¹⁸ Paul Thorez, *Model Children*, trans. Nancy Cadet (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1991), 41.

¹⁹ Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades*, 161.

²⁰ Major A. S. Hooper, *Through Soviet Russia: 1937* (London: Hooper, Purnell and Sons, Ltd., 1937), 102.

²¹ The provenance of the word “pioneer” should be explained. Although the term “pioneer,” as used in English, usually implies some sort of relation to trailblazing or innovation, the term did not seem to have the same connotations in Russian. The word *pioner* (пионер) was first used in Russia in 1705 in the letters and papers of Peter I, adopted from the seventeenth-century German “Pionier,” which was adopted from the French “pionnier,” or infantryman. Though *pioner* was later replaced by *pekhotinets* in common usage, the term retained its military association. Thus, the Young Pioneers were supposed to be the little foot soldiers of the Communist Party. Max Vasmer, O. N. Trubachev, B. A. Larin, *Etimologicheskii slovar’ russkogo iazyka: v chetyrekh tomakh, Izd. 2-e*, (Moskva: Progress, 1986-1987), Tom III, 264.

previously successful Russian Boy Scout program.²² The stated goals for the Pioneers were “to inculcate class consciousness, instincts of group formation and of competition, a sense of social living, an esteem for creative labor, a striving for knowledge, and a willingness to subordinate personal interests to those of society”;²³ in short, the Pioneers were to learn how to *live* communism.

Widely known as the “darling of the Party” or the “Boy Scouts of Russia,”²⁴ the Pioneer organization functioned for almost seventy years as the primary link between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and its children. The Pioneers cannot accurately be described as either darlings or Boy Scouts, and the goals, structures, and activities of the Pioneer organization remain largely unknown, obscured by such stereotypes and misnomers. Historians have generally neglected the story of the Pioneers and their role in the Soviet system, perhaps concluding that, as one scholar succinctly puts it, “as the junior counterpart of the Komsomol, it [the Pioneer organization] does not have a separate history.”²⁵

To dismiss the Pioneer organization as a sort of Kiddie-Komsomol, however, ignores several crucial differences between the two groups. The Komsomol was never conceived as a mass organization, that is as an association

²² See Julie deGraffenried, “The Origins of the V. I. Lenin All-Union Pioneer Organization,” (unpublished paper, The University of Texas at Austin, 1999).

²³ *V Vserossiiskii s"ezd RKSM, 11-19 oktiabria 1922 g.*, as cited in Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, 346-348.

²⁴ George S. Counts, *The Challenge of Soviet Education* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1957), 104–107.

²⁵ Kassof, *The Soviet Youth Program*, 20.

that seeks to include *everyone* who meets eligibility requirements such as age, whereas the Pioneer organization, from its inception, actively recruited children of all backgrounds and in all areas and instituted very few obstacles to membership. The Komsomol represented the “best and the brightest” on their way to Party candidacy; the Pioneers, on the other hand, were much more inclusive. As a mass organization striving for an ever-larger membership, the Pioneers’ goals and tactics differed significantly from those of the Komsomol.

The activities of the Komsomol and Pioneers varied as well, primarily because of the age groups participating in them. Teenagers and young adults comprised the membership of the Komsomol, whereas, the Pioneer organization included children between the ages of ten and fourteen – although at times in its history, the age range was nine to sixteen. The “grown-up” activities of the Komsomol were not always appropriate for the Pioneers, so the types of programs often differed. A solitary campaign, such as the liquidation of illiteracy, often produced widely-varying tasks for the Komsomol and Pioneer organization as well as the motivations for participating in them. Multiply that one campaign by hundreds – for there were many such “fronts” on which to struggle – and the expectations and activities for Komsomoltsy and Pioneers become exponentially distinct.

Finally, an entire iconography replete with symbols, ceremonies, oaths, and sacred sites developed under the aegis of the Pioneer organization for the

edification (and entertainment) of its young members, a characteristic setting the Pioneers completely apart from the Komsomol, which “disdained uniforms, salutes, and so forth, but . . . considered [them] appropriate for children.”²⁶ Indeed, it could be argued that a Pioneer culture emerged in the Soviet Union that encompassed and institutionalized Pioneer iconography. This Pioneer culture, complete with newspapers, literature, music, the performing arts, and radio, even designated sites specific to its development, from Artek, the famous summer camp, to the ubiquitous Pioneer corner in each Soviet schoolroom.

Thus, the Pioneers, a mass organization designed to appeal to a broad, young audience, should not be viewed as a minor-league Komsomol. The Pioneer organization challenges simplistic depictions, such as “character educator,”²⁷ “political indoctrinator”²⁸ or “behavior control program”;²⁹ sometimes Pioneer troops were all of these of these things – sometimes none. The multi-faceted Pioneer organization, above all, was an attempt to reach every child in the Soviet Union with the message of the Communist Party, its mass audience providing Party leaders the opportunity to influence and mobilize, for better or for worse, an impressionable yet unpredictable swath of the population, a group bounded neither by nationality, gender, nor socioeconomic status, seemingly omnipresent

²⁶ Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 193.

²⁷ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R.* (New York: Pocket Books, 1970), 2.

²⁸ Kenez, *Propaganda State*, 192.

²⁹ Kassof, *Soviet Youth Program*, 21.

within the public and private spaces in society. Accordingly, the creation of the organization, its goals, methods, activities, and problems must be posed as a distinct set of inquiries, addressed in relation to other Party components, such as the Komsomol, and placed within the historical framework of the Soviet era, but also treated as a unique, state-sponsored, socialist children's organization without historical precedent.

Recently, historian Laurie Bernstein wrote, "The picture that comes to mind when we think of Soviet youth is that of the communist scouts, the 'Young Pioneers' decked out in their red neckerchiefs and impossibly neat outfits, looking like a cross between Hitler youth and reverent bobbysoxers."³⁰ The Pioneers might indeed be *the* symbol of Soviet childhood; however, there is a dearth of recent work specifically discussing the organization, and in works with a broader scope, it usually merits merely a colorful anecdote or two.³¹ Though neglected, the Pioneer organization is enormously important as an intersection of state interests, ideology, society, and children. As one former Pioneer official put it, the Pioneers were "essentially an adult organization in which children

³⁰ Laurie Bernstein, review of *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* by Anne Gorsuch and *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932* by Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, in *History of Education Quarterly*, 43:1 (Spring 2003); available from The History Cooperative at http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/heq/43.1/br_2.html; Internet; accessed May 2, 2005.

³¹ A spate of fellow-traveler accounts of the Young Pioneers published primarily in the late 1920s and 1930s exist. While useful, they are not sufficiently critical nor scholarly to qualify as monographs. A few examples: Samuel Northrup Harper, *Civic Training in Soviet Russia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929); Beatrice King, *Changing Man: The Education System of the USSR* (New York: Viking Press, 1937); Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1938).

participated.”³² Thus, the state’s definition of childhood – appearance, values, activities, and so on – is made accessible through the programs and pronouncements of the Young Pioneers. Studying internal documents of the Pioneer organization illuminates the party’s attempts to define Sovietness, to propagandize, to direct the actions of the nation’s children as well as the struggles associated with insufficient resources and staff, overwhelming circumstances, and a sometimes uncooperative population. Not only does analysis of the organization demonstrate the shifting nature of the state’s ideals for and expectations of Soviet children, but also the difficulties involved in disseminating and “selling” those same ideals and expectations to children.

Apparently, this task became immeasurably more difficult in 1941. At the onset of the Great Patriotic War, children ages ten to fourteen comprised an estimated 11.4 percent of the population, and children under nineteen, a whopping 44.8 percent of the total population of the Soviet Union.³³ According to membership reports, some 61 percent of eligible children were members of the

³² Alexandre Strokanov, personal interview by author, Birmingham, Alabama, March 23, 2007. Strokanov was a high-level official in the Young Pioneer organization prior to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

³³ See Table 23.2 in Evgeny M. Andreev, Leonid E. Darsky, and Tatiana L. Kharkova, “Population Dynamics: Consequences of Regular and Irregular Changes,” in Wolfgang Lutz, Sergei Scherbov, Andrei Volkov, eds., *Demographic Trends and Patterns in the Soviet Union Before 1991* (London: Routledge, 1994), 430. Andreev, Darsky, and Kharkova provide population projections for mid-1941 based on official census data from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1950s, accounting for demographic catastrophes such as the civil war and 1933 famine and considering the expansion of Soviet territory after 1939. Projections suggest that children 10-14 comprised the second largest age cohort in the Soviet Union at 22,325,000; only the group aged 0-4 (26,514,000) exceeded this group.

Young Pioneers.³⁴ The war brought with it unprecedented challenges and conditions for the organization and for Soviet children, as it did for the entire population. It is at this intersection of children, state, and circumstance that I pose the questions which frame my dissertation: what was the war like for children? How did the state interact with children during the Great Patriotic War? What did the state expect of children during wartime? This study primarily focuses on children aged ten to fourteen – those whom the state expected to reach via the Young Pioneers. Though this project does not pretend to be an exhaustive account of children, the state, and the Great Patriotic War, many of the expectations and experiences described herein can be and should be extrapolated to children of all ages.

This study joins other recent explorations into the relationship between children and war.³⁵ Long viewed solely in the one-dimensional role of victim – and, indeed, children often are the greatest victims of war – scholars now agree

³⁴ RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 7, d. 77, l. 33. Statistics in a 1944 memo on Pioneer membership give comparative figures for 1939-1943. Membership in January 1941 is listed as 13,694,560. As noted above, Andreev, et.al., estimate population of children ages ten to fourteen in 1941 at 22,325,000. Evidently these membership figures were not widely-known, as there is obvious discrepancy between the organization's number and other accounts. For example, Boris Skomorovsky claims that there were ten million Pioneers, ages ten to sixteen, at the beginning of the war. The Anglo-Soviet Youth Friendship Alliance estimated a membership of fifteen million. Skomorovsky and E. G. Morris, *The Siege of Leningrad* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1944), 42; Anglo-Soviet Youth Friendship Alliance, *Soviet Youth Organizations: Pioneers, Komsomols: Sport and Culture* (London: The Alliance, 1943), 3.

³⁵ See, for example, the twenty-one essays in James Marten, ed., *Children and War: A Historical Anthology* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Marten, *The Children's Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), and *Lessons of War: The Civil War in Children's Magazines* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1999).

that “children have been and are deeply engaged in every facet of war.”³⁶ A study conducted during the Second World War concluded that by the age of ten years old, children have a “detailed, serious, factual almost adult interest” in war.³⁷ The authors found that ten-year-olds could differentiate between theatres of war and branches of the military, that they listened to the news and followed maps, and that they had been helping with war work since the age of six.³⁸ Children are consumers in war: they buy books, toy soldiers, guns, and tanks, and they pay for war-themed entertainment.³⁹ Child-soldiers have fought in every modern war; others play at it, using sticks for guns and rocks for grenades. And because children are “rarely left to interpret the causes and meanings and ramifications of wars completely on their own . . . children’s experiences during wartime cannot be separated from larger efforts by families, governments, schools, . . . to shape the responses and even memories of children.”⁴⁰

Studies conducted by Russian psychologists during World War I demonstrated that children were interested in war, that it influenced their behavior, and that media could shape their perceptions of it.⁴¹ Russian educators worried that the war might have a detrimental moral influence on its young and

³⁶ Marten, *Children and War*, 8.

³⁷ Arnold Gesell and Frances L. Ilg, *The Child From Five to Ten* (New York: Harper and Bros. Publishers, 1946), 447.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 447-449.

³⁹ Marten, *The Children’s Civil War*, 15.

⁴⁰ Marten, *Children and War*, 7.

⁴¹ Aaron J. Cohen, “Flowers of Evil: Mass Media, Child Psychology, and the Struggle for Russia’s Future During the First World War,” in Marten, *Children and War*, 38-49.

discussed methods of protecting them from its ill effects. No such compunctions vexed the Party during the Great Patriotic War. Soviet children had been in near-constant “mobilization” mode for decades. Military language permeated the entire Pioneer organization: members were divided into troops and detachments; they were encouraged to struggle on various “fronts” against such enemies as poor hygiene and kulaks; they wore uniforms and marched in parade formation. The Great Patriotic War provided both real enemies and real struggle for those who were Pioneers in the early 1940s. Children were immersed in the conflict: school subjects revolved around the war; Pioneer troops encouraged massive war work; every story, poem, and photo in the children’s press concerned the war; children’s radio broadcast on only one topic – the war. The state did not soft-peddle this war nor did it gloss over atrocities some might consider unsuitable for children; rather, the desperate conditions on the frontlines were described in great detail. Heroism and national identity were defined for children based on anecdotal and fictional narratives about feats on the frontline and homefront. Even accomplishing commonplace tasks, such as getting good grades, contributed to the cause.⁴² This conflict – persisting in ordinary life under extraordinarily grim circumstances – imparted an underlying tension to the state’s messages to children.

⁴² Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, “Our City, Our Hearths, Our Families: Local Loyalties and Private Life in Soviet World War II Propaganda,” *Slavic Review*, 59,4 (Winter 2000), 825-847; Cynthia Simmons and Nina Perlina, *Writing the Siege of Leningrad: Women’s Diaries, Memoirs, and Documentary Prose* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), xxxi.

According to Soviet mythology, children responded en masse – all under the aegis of the Young Pioneers. The “young avengers,” acting in one accord and with one motivation, fulfilled and surpassed all expectations of the state, busily working and fighting alongside their older counterparts.⁴³ For decades, the official historiography of the war swept aside “errors, defeats, and sheer stupidity”⁴⁴ to focus on a story of epic heroism that bore little resemblance to the day-to-day experience endured by the Soviet people or to the haphazard, sometimes irrational, manner in which the state managed the war. Since the 1990s, this has been and continues to be remedied by a small, though significant, number of memoirs and wartime narratives from the former Soviet Union that contradict the standard story and bring the war down from its larger-than-life, monolithic heights to the personal level. While Western scholars have long sought to depict the war more accurately than their Soviet counterparts were willing or able to, still, no history of the children’s Great Patriotic War exists to countermand the Soviet myth, much less to raise important questions about children and war in the Soviet Union.

One aim of this dissertation is to provide a more accurate portrait of the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War, a portrait which considers the child’s experience, the state’s expectations of children, and an exploration of the

⁴³ See, for example, S. Furin, *The World of Young Pioneers* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982), 50-52.

⁴⁴ Marius Broekmeyer, *Stalin, the Russians, and Their War*, translated by Rosalind Buck (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), xiii.

institution responsible for disseminating the state's messages to children, the Young Pioneers. These descriptions are revealing and contribute greatly to our knowledge of the Soviet war effort. While the initial question which guided my research involved the *content* of the state's expectations for children, the more interesting story turned out to be the *motive* behind the state's expectations for children during the war – the “why” helped to shed light on the “what.”

This dissertation argues that the state's expectations for children during the Great Patriotic War were issued primarily in order to save the floundering Young Pioneer organization. During the war, the Party expected that the Pioneers would serve as its representative and mouthpiece amongst the younger generation. The Pioneer organization was supposed to manage and supervise children in all sorts of tasks, campaigns, and ideas appropriate to the war. This Pied-Piper-like role had defined the Young Pioneers since its inception in 1922; by the end of the 1930s, it was becoming reality, reaching large numbers of children newly-enrolled in Soviet schools and establishing such iconic figures as Pavlik Morozov in Soviet lore. In the early years of the war, however, archival documents indicate that the Pioneers struggled to maintain their leadership role and nearly collapsed under the strain of wartime conditions. In order to resurrect its image and secure its rightful place in the vanguard of children, the Young Pioneer leadership reorganized and launched scores of campaigns designed to reassert the leadership of the Pioneers among children.

First, Pioneers revamped their language and values to more accurately reflect the conditions of war. The organization was not so much reinvented as it was reintroduced to Soviet children as relevant and germane to their lives, experiences, and feelings. The language with which the Pioneers provided children, via media and instruction, appears to have resonated with its intended audience. By supplying models of heroism that demonstrated carefully selected behaviors, emotions, and speech, the Pioneer organization supplied children with the language needed to express their outrage, sorrow, and patriotism in prescribed ways. More to the point, the use of this language and the internalization of Soviet values by children could support the Pioneers' claim to leadership among children.

Second, the Pioneers needed to assert ownership of campaigns of action for children, sure-fire, appealing campaigns that could guarantee the revival of the organization's leading role. Thus, the Pioneer organization drew its ideas from preexisting activities – the jobs, tasks, and activities that children were already doing in 1941-1942, largely on individual or local initiative. The crisis in the organization provides a window through which to see the enterprise and resourcefulness of Soviet children. What had been conceived of and run as a *prescriptive* organization for much of its twenty-year history became a *descriptive* organization, subsuming all appropriate acts into the more important task of reestablishing the Pioneer organization at the forefront of Soviet childhood.

Everything from metal collecting to schoolwork was classified as war work, and by claiming to initiate and direct such tasks, the Pioneers alleged leadership of all children's activities. Yet, the adoption of preexisting acts suggests that children had far more agency than previously assumed as their activities formed the core of Pioneer promotions for the remainder of the war. Contrary to the idea that totalitarian states are unresponsive or indifferent to society, the Communist Party drew on popular measures and motivations in order to save its children's organization, proving once again that the word "totalitarian" must be applied cautiously to the Soviet state. And, the many roles children played – adopted by the Pioneers after late 1942 – suggest a far more complex "Soviet child" than the child-victim normally associated with the Great Patriotic War and its propaganda.

The perceived crisis in the Pioneer organization as well as the response to it is unique among Soviet institutions and an important contribution of this dissertation to the historiography of the war. It has been noted that the war and its immediate losses shook the Soviet leadership. A sort of general uneasiness with the poor showing in the early years of the struggle against Nazi Germany plagued the Party and undermined its confidence. The unifying language of patriotism replaced the ideological rhetoric of communism, even in Stalin's speeches to the nation. Scholars have noted two distinct stages in the Party's response to the

war.⁴⁵ In the first stage, from the beginning of the war until early 1943, rather than giving the Party a commanding role in a thus-far unsuccessful war, individual people and individual acts of heroism were recognized as leaders of the war effort. The second stage, from 1943 until the war's successful conclusion, reflected the turning of the tide in the war after the battles of Stalingrad and Kursk, when "it was suddenly realized that ideological work had been neglected. Immediate measures were taken."⁴⁶ The Party reemerged as conductor of war work. Stalin was idolized much more actively and pervasively. Jeffrey Brooks describes the look of *Pravda's* post-Stalingrad shift – a flood of medals issued, the redesign of officer's uniforms, the promotion of the Stalin cult, collective rather than individual heroism – as the state, not the people, resumed its role as the source of all reward and honor.⁴⁷ The decline and revival of the Young Pioneers appears to fit into these stages: the crisis within the organization was identified in the fall of 1942 and the following year marked the beginning of the turnaround in Pioneer fortunes. This project, though, suggests that institution-specific motives must be taken into consideration when discussing the two stages of Party activity. No other Party institution, as far as is known, felt its existence

⁴⁵ See, for example, Gennadi Bordiugov, "The Popular Mood in the Unoccupied Soviet Union: Continuity and Change During the War," in Thurston and Bonwetsch, eds., *The People's War*; Jeffrey Brooks, "Pravda Goes to War," in Stites, ed., *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*; Lisa Kirschenbaum, "Our City, Our Hearths, Our Families: Local Loyalties and Private Life in Soviet World War II Propaganda," *Slavic Review*. Vol. 59, No. 4 (Winter 2000): 825-847.

⁴⁶ Bordiugov, "The Popular Mood in the Unoccupied Soviet Union," in Thurston and Bonwetsch, eds., *The People's War*, 68.

⁴⁷ Brooks, "Pravda Goes to War," in Stites, ed., *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, 21-24.

threatened – the situation which dictated all subsequent actions of the Young Pioneers. Stalin, for example, was never seriously in danger of losing his position. His concern was far more subtle – to distance himself from failure and to associate himself with triumph. Nor did the Pioneers’ methods match those of, say, Brooks’ *Pravda*. Individual heroes played an important role in Pioneer lore throughout the war, and Stalin’s shift in visibility was far less extreme within the Pioneer organization. Though this study does not discredit the “post-Stalingrad turn” identified by other scholars, it does suggest that “the turn” must be applied with more caution and discrimination. Among Soviet institutions in the war, the Young Pioneers’ story is remarkable.

The post-Stalingrad turnaround in military fortunes granted Stalin the chance to reassert his importance and authority; simultaneously, the Pioneers launched a concerted effort to resurrect their own reputation and visibility. (Re)becoming the vanguard among Soviet children, the organization established the foundations for a Pioneer-led heroism storied in Soviet history. Though internal problems continued to dog the Pioneers for years, the foundational story was established in the latter years of the Great Patriotic War. Beginning in 1943, the organization began writing itself into the post-war victory narrative, alleging uninterrupted and successful leadership among children, active duty in the war, and ignoring the near-catastrophe they had averted.

The initial chapters of this dissertation provide context for this fascinating story. Chapter Two offers a brief history of the Young Pioneer organization up to the outbreak of war in 1941. Chapter Three examines experiences and conditions common to children during the Great Patriotic War. A growing number of memoirs, written by people who experienced the war as children, have been published in recent years. Supplemented by archival information, these accounts portray the unique position of children in chaotic wartime and immensely complicate the simplistic portrayal of wartime childhood presented by the Soviet state. Grave circumstances, some caused by external forces (the German occupation), some caused by internal forces (state policies or evacuation efforts), presented extraordinary obstacles for the Pioneer organization's alleged leadership among children. Chapter Four chronicles the perceived crisis within the Young Pioneer organization in the early years of war. The solution to these troubles and the multitude of expectations, values, and tasks piled upon Soviet children by the state is the subject of Chapters Five and Six, while the resurrection of the Young Pioneer organization and its subsequent mythologization is recounted in Chapter Seven.

In the midst of great privation and hardship, the state expected Soviet children to contribute all they could to the war effort. Other nations attempted to shield their children from the war's brutality; even Soviet propaganda for adults portrayed children one-dimensionally – as victims. The messages sent to children

via the Young Pioneers, however, differed radically. Rather than focusing solely on the victimization of children, the state empowered children by sacralizing the quotidian and demanding of them grown-up tasks and attitudes. Some children appreciated the ability to “do something” for the motherland, and the state profited from their activities and labor. The *chief* beneficiary of this empowerment, though, was its perceived leader, the Pioneer organization. Having struggled in the early years of the war, the organization was able, by war’s end, to write itself into the state’s carefully crafted narrative of glorious Soviet victory.

CHAPTER 2

THE YOUNG PIONEERS, 1922-1941

. . . train the masses for conscious and disciplined labour

when they are still young . . .

Vladimir Lenin, speech at Third Komsomol Congress, 1920 ¹

Besides a multitude of Soviet-era, authorized versions, no history of the Young Pioneers exists. Considering the ubiquity and popularity of the Pioneers, this is rather surprising. What follows, then, is a brief account of the first two decades of the organization's existence. Abiding by the dictates of Party leadership, the Pioneer organization sought to teach and promote ideals of the Bolsheviks among children throughout the decades of the 1920s and 1930s. The substance of these instructions changed with the political climate. From the limited, retrospectively lighthearted campaigns of the NEP era to the more heavy-handed demonstrations of the turbulent years of Stalinism, the Pioneers sought to prescribe particular behaviors for children. The Pioneer organization grew quickly in its first two decades of existence, steadily increasing its membership. On the eve of war in the early 1940s, no threat to continued organizational

¹ V.I. Lenin, *The Tasks of the Youth Leagues: speech delivered at the Third Congress of the Young Communist League, October 2, 1920* (Moscow: Cooperative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the U.S.S.R., 1935), 16.

growth, influence, and activity loomed. The Pioneers appeared to be a healthy children's organization, absorbed in the proper upbringing of Soviet children.

* * *

The Genesis of the Young Pioneers

After the Bolsheviks' ascension to power in October 1917, they embarked on a campaign of radical transformation – much of which occurred within days or weeks of the takeover. In a dramatic shift in foreign policy, Russia abandoned her allies and sued for peace with Germany, ending her involvement in the “imperialist” world war; in the arts, “proletarian,” avant-garde, experimental artists enjoyed a measure of government support; in the economy, the new government gave official approval to peasant appropriation of rural land and nationalized all industries; in education, the new Commissar of Education instituted polytechnical education, introducing physical labor in the curriculum, and abolishing grades, placement exams, and homework. The purpose of this rapid transformation was clear: to, as quickly as possible, lay the foundations for a new socialist state, ridding Russia, once and for all, of the backward, exploitative bonds of autocracy, feudalism/capitalism, and religion.

The organization of children, however, was not one of these immediate priorities. The Bolsheviks' decision to extend party patronage to the fourteen-

and-under crowd occurred five years after the revolution with the creation of the Young Pioneers in 1922. Further, the influence of pre-Revolutionary children's organizations, most notably the Russian Boy Scouts, is evident in the structure, iconography, and methods of the Pioneers. To make sense of this, one must consider the context in which the organization was created.

In 1897, the average age in Russia was 25.16 years (74.9 million Russians -- 64.5 percent of the population -- were under thirty years of age), and the revolutionaries who made up the Russian Social Democratic Party were reflective of this relatively young society.² The universities and seminaries seemed to graduate revolutionaries rather than students, so much so that in autocratic Russia, the two words became synonymous.³ Accordingly, the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democrats declared themselves the party of youth. V. I. Lenin proclaimed, "Let us leave it to the Constitutional Democrats to pick up 'tired' old men of thirty, revolutionaries who 'have become wiser' and Social-Democratic renegades. We shall always be the party of the vanguard of youth!"⁴ Lenin and the Bolsheviks affirmed this stance in the wake of the October revolution,

² Tsentr Khraneniia Dokumentov Molodezhnykh Organizatsii, *Molodezhnoe dvizhenie v Rossii, 1917-1928: dokumenty i materialy*. Chast' 1 i 2. (Moskva: Tsentr Khraneniia Dokumentov Molodezhnykh Organizatsii, 1993), 7.

³ Ibid.

⁴ V. I. Lenin, *Works*, 4th Russian ed., Vol. II, 319, as quoted in Nadezhda K. Krupskaiia, *On Education: Selected Articles and Speeches*, trans. G. P. Ivanov-Mumjiev (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1957), 159.

creating a youth organization for teenagers and young adults (generally ages 15-26), the Komsomol (*Kommunisticheskii Soiuz Molodezhi*), in early 1918.⁵

The organization of children, however, was not immediately addressed, though plenty of ideas in Marxist writings supported it. A materialist approach to history alone demanded that Russian material conditions be altered in order to create the environment for a socialist society to flourish, for “the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life.”⁶ In addition, a children’s organization which instilled socialist precepts in its members might help to propagate proper family and societal relations, such as equality and love of work, as well as breeding a healthy distaste for capitalism and its inherent evils.⁷

Nadezhda Konstantinova Krupskaiia, long-time Bolshevik and wife of Lenin, wrote at length about Party work among children. Responding to those who scoffed at organizing “babies,” Krupskaiia claimed that in the old days of tsarist rule, “every time there was a strike you could see children marching at the

⁵ “Ob organizatsii kommunisticheskogo soiuz molodezhi. Tsirkularnoe pis'mo TsK RKP(b), noiabr' 1918 g.” in *Perepiska Sekretariata TsK RKP(b) s mestnymi partiinymi organizatsiiami (noiabr-dekabr 1918)* (Moskva: Politzdat, 1970), T.5, 33-34., as printed in B. K. Krivoruchenko and N. V. Trushchenko, *Dokumenty KPSS o leninskom komsomole i pionerii*, (Moskva: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1987), 6.

⁶ Karl Marx, “The German Ideology: Part I”, in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, second edition, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 154.

⁷ See, for example, Friedrich Engels, “The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State,” in *ibid.*, 734-759; Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844”, in *ibid.*, 99; and Marx, “The German Ideology”, in *ibid.*, 146-200.

head of processions, slinging mud at shop foremen or factory managers. They were with the workers heart and soul.”⁸ She suggested the formation of a Russian Young Workers’ League for “all boys and girls, young men and women who live by the sale of their labour,” irrespective of language and religion.⁹ Indeed, in the immediate wake of the October revolution, several independent, localized groups for children emerged, including Petrograd’s *Trud i svet* (Work and Light), Tula’s Children’s Communist Party, and the Ukrainian Young Spartacists.¹⁰ Without adequate support and resources from the central government, however, these movements faltered.

While Krupskaja might have been the most prolific writer on children and the construction of a socialist society, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin’s words on the subject were considerably more influential in spurring the Party to action. The essence of the Soviet approach to children, at least in its earliest stages, is found in a speech given by Lenin on October 2, 1920. In it, Lenin declared that the Komsomol had the responsibility to “train the masses for conscious and disciplined labour when they are still young, from the age of twelve.”¹¹ New

⁸ Krupskaja, *On Education*, 111.

⁹ “How Are Young Workers to Organize?” *Pravda* (20 June 1917), as printed in *ibid.*, 141-144.

¹⁰ *Na bol’shevistskom puty. Sbornik dokumentov 1917 g. po istorii Leningradskoi organizatsii VLKSM*, (Leningrad: 1932), 75-76, 81-83, 84-92, as printed in TsKhDMO, *Molodezhnoe dvizhenie* 78-79, 80-82, 83-93; A. M. Prokhorov, ed., *Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia, English*, (New York: Macmillan, 1973), s.v. “Children’s Democratic Organizations,” by E. S. Sokolova, V. V. Lebedinskii, V. A. Pushkina; Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, 191. *Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia* hereafter cited as *BSE*.

¹¹ Lenin, *The Tasks of the Youth Leagues*, 16.

material conditions would create new relationships in the school, in the home, and in the workplace, thus transforming the entire community. While “the generation which is now about fifty years old cannot count on seeing communist society. . . . the generation which is now fifteen years old will see communist society, and will itself build it” – hence the need for a generation imbued with communist ethics and discipline.¹² The Party reiterated Lenin’s remarks in April 1920, asserting that children represented the “communist reserve of our party” and must be prepared accordingly.¹³

In these remarks one hears the ring of confidence. Despite the wretched conditions spawned by years of civil war, Lenin and the Bolsheviks had safely secured their position – at least for the moment - as leaders of the former Russian empire and were looking ahead to constructing the new society. Only in the relative peace and tranquility of NEP Russia, only after the Soviet state had solidified its hold on power by surviving and winning a horrendous civil conflict, and only after two wars, a famine, and a revolution had produced millions of abandoned children was official action taken to organize children.

Thus, in 1922, five years after the October revolution, the Fifth All-Russian Congress of the Komsomol announced its intention to create an organization specifically for the Soviet child. The stated goals for this new

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “O rabote sredi molodezhi. Tsirkuliar TsK RKP(b), iun’ 1920g.”, in *Spravochnik partiinogo rabotnika* Vyp. 1, 142-143, as printed in Krivoruchenko and Trushchenko, *Dokumenty KPSS*, 12.

children's group were "to inculcate class consciousness, instincts of group formation and of competition, a sense of social living, an esteem for creative labor, a striving for knowledge, and a willingness to subordinate personal interests to those of society";¹⁴ in short, Soviet children were to learn how to *live* communism.

It is ironic, then, that this new communist children's organization should be so indebted to a club dedicated to "Faith in God. Loyalty to the Tsar. Help to Others."¹⁵: the Russian *Boi-Skauty*. The first Russian scout troop was established in 1909, following the publication of Sir Robert Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys* under the title *The Young Scout (Iunyi Razvedchik)*. Popular among urban middle and upper class boys and girls, the scout movement in Russia expanded rapidly, aided by a well-organized central organization, an appealing program, and the support and patronage of Tsar Nicholas II. Nicholas himself met with Baden-Powell in 1911, and, in 1914, allowed his son Aleksei to join a scout troop.¹⁶ By 1917, Russia could boast a scout membership of fifty thousand boys and girls, easily the most popular group for children in the country.¹⁷

¹⁴ *V Vserossiiskii s'ezd RKSM, 11-19 oktiabria 1922 g.*, as cited in Ralph Talcott Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth: a study of the Congresses of the Komsomol, 1918-1954*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 346-348.

¹⁵ Jim Riordan, "The Russian Boy Scouts," *History Today*, 37 (October 1988), 48; TsKhDMO, *Molodezhnoe dvizhenie*, 28.

¹⁶ Nicholas' support for the scouts may not have been entirely idealistic. It is suggested that Nicholas took this step to disguise Aleksei's battle with hemophilia.

¹⁷ Prokhorov, ed., *BSE*, s.v. "Scouting"; Kitty Weaver, *Russia's Future: The Communist Education of Soviet Youth* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), 32. Girls were encouraged to join the scout movement, though their training focused on domestic arts.

Though at least one scholar has recently argued that the Scouts' ideals were not nearly as conservative as usually perceived,¹⁸ the multitude of conflicts between the ideals of the scouting movement and of the communists are quite evident. The scouts stood for many principles to which the communists were diametrically opposed: loyalty to God and the tsar, duty to an imperialist nation, obedience to traditional authority figures, and contentment with one's place in the existing social system. Russian Scout congresses merely affirmed the Bolsheviks' misgivings: topics of discussion included the use of Boy Scouts in war and a comparison of the Boy Scouts to feudal knights - proof of an attempt by the bourgeoisie and imperialist powers to transform children into obedient, God-fearing soldier-slaves who would defend capitalism!¹⁹

Despite the ideological disjuncture, some Bolshevik leaders, most notably Krupskaya, Commissar of Enlightenment Anatoli Lunacharskii, and Commissar of Health Nikolai Semashko, were impressed with the success and efficiency of the Boy Scouts' organizational structure and methods as well as with its obvious popularity among children. Semashko and Lunacharskii proposed that the Party

¹⁸ David R. Jones, "Forerunners of the Komsomol: Scouting in Imperial Russia," in *Reforming the Tsar's Army: Military Innovation in Imperial Russia from Peter the Great to the Revolution*, David Schimmelpennick Van Der Oye and Bruce W. Manning, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 56-81.

¹⁹ *Skautizm v Rossii trudy pervogo s'ezda po skautizmu 26-30 dekabriia 1915 g. v Petrogradie*, Izd. *Obshchestva* "Russki skaut v Petrogradie (Petrograd: Tip. zhurnala *Sport i favority*, 1916), (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1985), 4, 84. Ironically, Hillcourt notes that in Britain, Baden-Powell was attacked as a socialist because he advocated brotherhood among scouts regardless of class. In addition, the scouts were criticized on the floor of the House of Commons for a lack of religious purpose. See William Hillcourt, *Baden-Powell: The Two Lives of A Hero* (London: Heinemann, 1964), 296-7.

absorb the scout movement and rename it.²⁰ This short-lived hybrid organization – the Young Communists, or *Iuki* - produced some fascinating results. At the age of ten, a Ukrainian Jewish boy, Lev Kopelev, became a scout in Kiev’s *Iuki* Troop #3. His female scoutmaster taught him about Baden-Powell, camping, gymnastics, and doing good deeds. Kopelev denigrated other troops as “White,” “Zionist,” or “Yellow-blue” (Ukrainian) nationalists, claiming that only those in his Wolf troop were “real, honest-to-goodness scouts; we defended the weak and the poor and didn’t object to the Soviet power.”²¹ Perhaps predictably, this experiment was scrapped, as the Komsomol condemned the Boy Scouts as militarist, politically unreliable, and disloyal, while the *Iuki* were deemed “a mechanical conglomeration of the bourgeois scouting system and communist phrases incapable of dealing with the physical tasks of educating proletarian children.”²²

By the end of 1922, the Central Committee of the Komsomol had established a special commission to construct a proposal for the program, principles, statutes, motto, rules, and organizational basis for a communist children’s group. The commission recommended the creation of a group named

²⁰ Riordan, “The Russian Boy Scouts,” 51.

²¹ Lev Kopelev, *The Education of a True Believer*, trans. Gary Kern, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980), 29.

²² *Vtoroi vserossiiski s’ezd RKSM* (Moskva-Leningrad: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1926), 160, 173, as printed in TsKhDMO, *Molodezhnoe dvizhenie*, 224. The original text read “. . . i shto, dalee, iukizm iavliaetsia mekhanicheskoi skleikoï burzhuaznoi skautskoi sistemy i kommunisticheskikh fraz, ni v koem sluchae ne mozhnet vypolniat’ zadachi fizicheskogo vospitaniia proletarskoi molodezhi.”

the Spartakan Young Pioneers (*Iunye pionery imeni spartaka*) and submitted a set of suggested protocols, customs, and organizational strategies which appear strikingly similar to those of the Russian Boy Scouts.²³ Any child, particularly those of working class or peasant origin, could join the Spartakan Pioneers. The organization was to include boys and girls ages ten to fourteen years. A hierarchical chain of command extended from the Central Bureau of Young Pioneers, under the direction of the Komsomol's Central Committee, to provincial, regional, and local committees. The link, comprised of eight to ten children, formed the smallest unit of Pioneer organization; several links made up a troop, and several troops comprised a detachment, all of which centered around a factory, mill, or children's home. Links, troops, and detachments were to be led by enthusiastic Komsomoltsy. Pioneers could be distinguished by a special uniform which included shorts, a red triangular neckerchief, and a badge. The laws of the Pioneers emphasized working-class solidarity and character values such as honesty, loyalty, and a healthy attitude. A list of customs (*obychai*) dictated desirable behavior, exhorting Pioneers to refrain from drinking, smoking, cursing, tardiness, or spitting on the floor, and encouraging thrift, personal hygiene, and manual labor. The Pioneers were endowed with a motto (challenge: "In the struggle for the working class, be ready!"; reply: "Always ready!"),

²³ "Iz organizatsionnogo polozheniia detskikh kommunisticheskikh grupp iunyk pionerov imeni spartaka. Utverzhdeno Biuro TsK RKSM, 28 avgusta 1923 g.," as printed in *Vsesoiuznaia pionerskaia organizatsiia imeni V. I. Lenina: dokumenty i materialy* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Molodaia Gvardiia, 1974), 18-22.

slogan, vow, and salute, all suspiciously resembling those of the accursed Scouts.²⁴ The communists involved in creating the Pioneer organization worked hard to distance their program from that of the Scouts despite the glaring appropriations. Pioneer publications made claims for the originality of the motto, the salute, and so on, rooting them in newly-fashioned Soviet folklore. For example, Lenin is said to have engendered the phrase “Always ready!” in a speech, and secret police chief Feliks Dzerzhinskii receives credit for the origin of the Pioneers’ distinctive red neckerchief.²⁵

Nevertheless, the Pioneers made their public debut in 1924 at the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik), bearing their new title, the V. I. Lenin All-Union Young Pioneer Organization.²⁶ With the weight of the new Soviet state behind it, the Pioneer organization became aggressively inclusive, instituting very few obstacles to membership and, sometimes, actively eliminating the competition. Conceived as a mass organization with no racial, class, or gender restrictions, the Pioneers were part of the Party’s attempt to create the new

²⁴ “Iz organizatsionnogo polozheniia detskikh kommunisticheskikh grupp iunykh pionerov imeni spartaka. Utverzhenno Biuro TsK RKSM 28 avgusta 1923 g.,” TsKhDMO, TsK VLKSM fond 1, opis 3, delo 8, list 58, as printed in TsKhDMO, *Molodezhnoe dvizheniia*, 18-22.

²⁵ See, for example, Furin, *The World of Young Pioneers*, 28-29. The mottoes of the Scouts and of the Pioneers translate into Russian identically (either “Byd’ gotov!” or “Vsegda gotov!”), although Soviet publications in English always translate the Pioneer motto as “Be ready!” or “Always ready!” to distinguish them from the scouts’ promise to “be prepared.”

²⁶ “O pereimenovanii detskikh kommunisticheskikh grupp imeni spartaka v detskie kommunisticheskie gruppy imeni tovarishcha lenina. Postanovlenie ekstrennogo plenuma TsK RKSM, 23 ianvaria 1924 g.” *Direktivy i dokumenty po voprosam pionerskogo dvizheniia* (Moskva: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1962), 75, as printed in *Vsesoiuznaia pionerskaia organizatsiia imeni V. I. Lenina*, 22.

Soviet man. Theoretically, the Pioneers were open to children from all walks of life, though children of workers and peasants were given first priority. Because of its character as a mass organization, “the suggestions to confine new members to certain categories, such as the children of Communists, or girls, or the children of agricultural laborers, were not considered expedient.”²⁷ Any child, no matter how suspect his or her family origins might be, could be nominated for membership, and each child went through a perfunctory probationary period of one to six months before being initiated into the Pioneer organization. Age seems to be the only restriction placed on members of the Pioneers; its outer limits fluctuated between nine and sixteen, but for the most part, Pioneers were between ten and fourteen years of age.

As a result, the Pioneer organization grew exponentially during the 1920s. From a base membership of 4,000 in October of 1922, the Pioneer membership increased to approximately 2.5 million in January, 1930, an increase of about 625 times.²⁸ By 1925, three years after its adoption as a union-wide program, 15 percent of primary school students and 23 percent of secondary students were

²⁷ Harper, *Civic Training*, 67.

²⁸ Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, Appendix H. Membership figures are as follows: 10/22: 4,000; 1/1/24: 161,000; 5/1/24: 200,000; 7/24: 200,000-250,000; 1/1/25: >1,000,000; 1/1/26: >1,500,000; 3/26: 1,586,000; 1/1/28: 1,682,000; 1/1/29: 1,792,000; 1/1/30: 2,476,000. Slightly varying membership figures can be found in Ina Schlesinger, “The Pioneer Organization: The Evolution of Citizenship Education in the Soviet Union,” Ph.D. dissertation (Columbia University Press, 1967), 53, and Ellsworth Raymond, *The Soviet State*, second edition, (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 281.

Pioneers.²⁹ By 1926, approximately 9.3 percent of all children ages 10 to 14 belonged to the Pioneer organization; by 1930, the percentage increased to 19 percent.³⁰ As befits the first *mass* youth organization, this phenomenal growth far outstripped that of its “elder”, selective organization, the Komsomol, both in total membership and percentage of eligible youth in the league, despite its four year head start (the Komsomol was founded in 1918) and larger potential audience (the Komsomol included youth from fifteen to twenty-four).³¹ All social classes were represented in the Pioneers, with the highest percentage belonging to the working class, and, in attracting children of both sexes, the Pioneers could be labeled a success: girls were just as likely to join the communist organization as boys.³²

The 1920s

Despite serious obstacles in funding and debates concerning methodology and resources throughout the era of NEP and the Cultural Revolution, the Young

²⁹ *Narodnoe proveshchenie v RSFSR v tsifrazkh*, 25, as quoted in Fitzpatrick, *Social Mobility*, 28. The secondary figures do not include factory schools.

³⁰ 1926 census figures indicate 17,090,000 children between the ages of 10 and 14 in the Soviet Union. Reported membership in the Pioneers was 1,586,000, as cited above in Fisher. Census information from *Vsesoyuznaia perepis naselenia 1926*, Vol. XVII (Moscow: 1930), as collected in Ellen Mickiewicz, *Handbook of Soviet Social Science Data*, (New York: The Free Press, 1973), 52.

³¹ Komsomol membership was reported as 1,960,000 in 1928 and 2,897,000 in 1931. A median figure between the two falls far below Pioneer membership of 3,223,000 in 1930. Komsomol membership figures for 1928 as compared to census figures for 1926 for age groups of 15-19 and 20-24 (together, 30,820,000) reveal that only 6.3% of the eligible population joined the Komsomol, though admittedly, the Komsomol did not adhere to policies of a mass organization. Komsomol figures from S. E. Vavilov, ed., *BSE Ezhegodnik, 1957-1969*, in *ibid.*, 169. Census figures, *ibid.*

³² Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, 191.

Pioneer organization prescribed a number of activities designed to mold the values of the Soviet child. A vast array of Pioneer responsibilities, opportunities, and work in ideological campaigns abounded in the twenties. Two major debates of the decade, within the organization, concerned methods within the Pioneer detachment and the role of the Pioneers in the school.

Within the detachment, aside from attendance requirements, Pioneers were expected to participate in certain activities, according to their interests. Some served as junior correspondents for the detachment's "wall newspaper"; others exchanged letters with Pioneers in other parts of the Soviet Union or with children in other parts of the world.³³ Each detachment sponsored circles to which any Pioneer was invited to participate, regardless of link affiliation. One circle might teach sewing, another radio repair, and another the writings of Lenin, but each was designed, ostensibly, to maintain the interest of Pioneers as well as attract non-Pioneer children to the organization.³⁴ Pioneers attended the circles or clubs sponsored by the detachment for entertainment and educational purposes. These circles, while catering to the interests of the children, were supposed to serve a dual purpose; hobbies or activities were to be carefully linked to social issues, as identified by the Party. For example, naturalist circles' studies of mosquitoes and

³³ Harper, *Civic Training*, 74.

³⁴ See S. Furin, compiler, *The World of Young Pioneers*, trans. Peter Doria and Helen Robinson (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982); Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?*, Vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), 404ff; Harper, *Civic Training*, 74 .

germs might also “concern the natural resources and productive strength of the USSR and the best way to use them in order to develop the national economy . . . concern work, such as problems of health, e.g., fighting malaria . . . [or] concern work, such as questions of materialism based on the study of nature with respect to antireligious agitation.”³⁵ Quite a lesson for a ten-year-old! Whether or not lessons of this type actually occurred is not clear; probably the majority of discussions consisted of “lighter” fare. In addition to these detachment activities, the Pioneers were responsible for leading the Little Octobrists children’s organization. The Little Octobrists, formed in the late twenties, was an organization for children from seven to ten years old. Older Pioneers served as link leaders for Octobrist groups within their factory or neighborhood, taking them on field trips, playing games with them, and singing songs.³⁶

Pioneers also participated in public health, social issues, and ideological campaigns sponsored by the Communist Party. In the campaign for sanitary living conditions, Pioneers were exhorted to “destroy five rats and ten mice annually” and “wage unrelenting warfare on mosquitoes, bedbugs, roaches, and flies”!³⁷ Pioneers were also active in Party campaigns to liquidate illiteracy and

³⁵ “Direktiv, 16 noiabria 1925”, in *Records of the Smolensk Oblast of the All-Union Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 1917-1941* (Weinberg: Microfilmed by the Departmental Records Branch, TAGO (The Adjutant General Office; Washington, D. C.), 1957), WKP 133. Smolensk archival documents are hereafter cited as WKP and the appropriate file number.

³⁶ See, for example, discussion in Kassof, *The Soviet Youth Program*, 20.

³⁷ George S. Counts, *The Soviet Challenge to America* (New York: The John Day Company, 1931), 152-153, as quoted in Counts, *The Challenge of Soviet Education* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1957), 182.

fight drunkenness. A report to the sixteenth congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) claimed that the Pioneers had taught one million illiterates to read and delivered over five hundred thousand books to needy areas.³⁸ At home and in their neighborhoods, Pioneers were urged to oppose corporal punishment, yet emphasize the importance of family ties.³⁹ The Pioneer Commune for Orphans opened in Moscow in 1924, providing one more shelter for the estimated seven million children left homeless by the social disorder of two wars.⁴⁰ In rural areas, Pioneers were encouraged to decorate and clean local schools, perform light tasks for the local peasants, and organize discussions with area children; in this way, the Party hoped to gain the favor of peasants repelled by the anti-religious stand taken by the Komsomol and the League of the Militant Godless.⁴¹

A continual source of concern within the Pioneer organization involved the nature of activities and methods being used within Pioneer detachments. Most debate revolved around the question of balancing work and play. Not surprisingly, many detachments in the twenties suffered from the lack of an established program, and usually turned to one extreme – all serious political

³⁸ BSE, 243.

³⁹ Harper, *Civic Training*, 78.

⁴⁰ Shelter information from Beatrice King, *Changing Man: The Education System of the USSR* (New York: The Viking Press, 1937), 259-262; the statistic on *bezprizorniki* from Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996), 780.

⁴¹ Harper, *Civic Training*, 79-80. Harper goes on to note that work in the countryside was considered quite important because “the children of the Russian village are notoriously passive and backward.”

work – or the other – only play. Krupskaja wrote numerous articles suggesting that “a Young Pioneer organization, naturally, should not be run like an adult one. It would be bad indeed if it were a carbon copy of one.”⁴² Evidence suggests that she was responding to a genuine concern within the organization about meetings that were too boring or abstract. On the other hand, in *The Diary of a Communist Schoolboy*, the main character recalls that “all that our pioneers . . . ever did was to march about the hall and play games.”⁴³ Out of this discourse emerged a call for age-appropriate activities as well as a defense of play and games as acceptable methods of communist pedagogy for Pioneers.

Krupskaja encouraged link leaders to adopt a balanced approach, related to children’s interests and age, which combined games, songs, and excursions with socially useful tasks and political discussion.⁴⁴ She suggested, “Instead of using Pioneer meetings to discuss problems of discipline, smoking, and teaching rules and regulations of the Pioneer movement, it is advisable rather to devote their meetings to the teaching of songs, games, reading aloud, etc.”⁴⁵ Krupskaja did not advocate the exclusion of communist principles in Pioneer activities, rather a more age-appropriate method to teach important values such as

⁴² Krupskaja, *On Education*, 108.

⁴³ N. Ogniov (Mikhail Grigorevich Rozanov), *The Diary of a Communist Schoolboy*, trans., Alexander Werth, (New York: Parson & Clarke Limited, 1928), 255.

⁴⁴ See, for example, “The Young Pioneer Movement as a Pedagogical Problem,” in *Uchitelskaia Gazeta*, No. 15, April 8, 1927, as printed in Krupskaja, *On Education*, 108-109; Helen B. Redl, editor and translator, *Soviet Educators on Soviet Education* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 231.

⁴⁵ N. K. Krupskaja, *Communist Upbringing* (Moscow: Young Guard, 1934), 129-133, as printed in Redl, *Soviet Educators*, 231.

collectivism. Games provided one method of imbuing Pioneers with a collectivist spirit, serving as a buffer against any influences that might denigrate the precepts taught in the Pioneer organization.⁴⁶

Games, wrote Krupskaia, are the school of organization.⁴⁷ Children enjoy games; games develop physical abilities, mental ingenuity, and “more, they promote children’s organizational capacity, self-control, endurance, ability to gauge the situation, and so on”;⁴⁸ therefore, the use of games in Pioneer activities was not only acceptable, but preferable. Not all games, however, could be successfully implemented in the Pioneer program. Bad games, according to Krupskaia, were those that “make children cruel and rude, fan hatred for other nations, affect children’s nervous system, arouse gambling instincts and vanity.”⁴⁹ Games at the end of which one gains and another loses were not acceptable, for that would entail competition. In games which promoted *socialist* competition, on the other hand, “it is to each pupil’s enlightened self-interest to watch over his neighbor, encourage the other’s good performance and behavior, and help him when he is in difficulty.”⁵⁰ Thus, the use of socialist competition in games between links, detachments, sports circles, hobby circles, and so on became quite

⁴⁶ Trow, *Character Education*, 64.

⁴⁷ N. K. Krupskaia, *O detskoi literature i detskoi chtenii* (Moskva: Detskaia literatura, 1979), 159.

⁴⁸ Krupskaia, *On Education*, 109.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R.* (New York: Pocket Books, 1970), 52.

popular within the Pioneer organization, foreshadowing the Stakhanovite movement which introduced socialist competition into the workplace during the early 1930s.

A more pressing debate for the Pioneer organization in the twenties concerned its relationship to schools. From the perspective of the Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros), this dispute is examined thoroughly in Larry E. Holmes' *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse*.⁵¹ Holmes suggests that, in creating a Soviet education system, Narkompros went through three distinct stages of development, influenced by competing theories within Soviet society about what Soviet education should be. From 1917 to 1921, Narkompros, influenced by the utopianism of revolution, instituted polytechnical education, abolished grades, homework, and placement exams, and introduced physical labor into the school curriculum. Bending to pressures from above (namely, Lenin and other prominent Bolsheviks), Narkompros reevaluated its radical approach to education. During the NEP period, education was characterized by a return to pre-revolutionary standards: a traditional curriculum, reinstatement of exams and fees, and so on. This was successful – for the children from formerly-privileged backgrounds. Children of working-class and peasant families, however, dropped out or failed out of school in high numbers. With the heightening of rhetoric about class warfare beginning around 1928, Narkompros reinstated the radical

⁵¹ Larry Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse: Reforming Education in Soviet Russia, 1917-1931* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991).

curriculum it first attempted immediately after the revolution. Though working-class and peasant student numbers increased, the needs of an industrial society such as the one Stalin sought to build demanded a more traditional education with rigorous attention to the sciences and math. Bowing to criticism from above, Narkompros would reintroduce, for the second time, a more traditional education system.

The role of the Pioneers in schools was unclear at its inception in 1922. Detachments and brigades were purposely centered on factories or mills because it was thought, from a revolutionary standpoint, that teachers had a questionable influence on students.⁵² In fact, some even believed that a primary purpose for creating the Pioneers was to “capture” the teachers and the schools for the Party; the Pioneers could serve as the eyes, ears, and voice of the Party within the school.⁵³ In general, the Pioneers’ task was to “draw the school into the social and political life of the country, organise the self-government, help the teachers in every way, including the actual teaching, and contribute to the political, physical, and anti-religious training of the young.”⁵⁴ Guidelines such as these, however, led to conflict between Pioneers and teachers. Some Pioneers interpreted them to mean that their fellow students needed “saving” from non-Party teachers, openly

⁵² Harper, *Civic Training*, 67.

⁵³ Counts, *The Challenge of Soviet Education*, 68.

⁵⁴ Ogniov, *The Diary of a Communist Schoolboy*, 274.

challenging teachers' authority and sometimes flouting school rules altogether.⁵⁵

In a speech to the thirteenth Party Congress in 1924, Bukharin scolded Pioneers for their belligerency and called them guilty of "vanguardism."⁵⁶

Conflict intensified during the Cultural Revolution, though the Pioneers seemed to gain the upper hand. The organization was part of the movement that advocated the "pedagogy of the environment" and the "withering away of the school."⁵⁷ Some Pioneer leaders suggested that the children's movement should supersede the school entirely, as the frenzy of the first Five-Year Plan popularized the concept of "socially useful work" rather than formal education.⁵⁸ As the national atmosphere combined with the increasing influence of the Pioneer organization within the school, membership in the organization suddenly shot up, perhaps because the Pioneers gained a new sense of purpose in line with Stalin's goals.⁵⁹ Of course, some children might have been attracted to *any* organization which downplayed the importance of school! In any case, the dispute over the Pioneers' role in schools was not resolved until early in the 1930s.

In the early years of Soviet history, when many were unsure what exactly a socialist society – or socialist child – ought to look like, the Pioneer

⁵⁵ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 29.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 142, 227.

⁵⁸ F. Korolev, *Protiv antileninskoi teorii otmiraviya shkoly*, (Moskva: 1932), 67, as quoted in *ibid.*, 150. The slogan popularized by the movement: "Ne shkola, a detskoe kommunisticheskoe dvizhenie."

⁵⁹ See Schlesinger, "The Pioneer Organization," 62-63; Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, 267.

organization offered a myriad of prescriptions. Based on the original laws and customs of the Pioneers, ideal children were to be ardent, yet obedient and mannerly, supporters of Leninism and the Party. Children were not exempted from the work of the Party; they were to keep busy. Rarely locked into one particular campaign, the Pioneers were to participate in all of them through activities and responsibilities, within the link and without. Indeed, some children remained so busy between schoolwork and Pioneer responsibilities that they became physically ill, though this surely did not apply to the majority of children.⁶⁰ The various drives – against illiteracy, child abuse, drunkenness, and so on – can be considered the Party’s efforts to push modernity upon the Russian empire and to define it for its children. Modern, Soviet children were to attend school; though the relationship between the Young Pioneers and the school was far from clear or stable, it is clear that the organization encouraged its members to be educated, whether that meant traditional pedagogy or non-traditional methods of labor education. Even play was viewed as an educational opportunity. Children were to be taught the proper collective spirit and attitude toward socialist competition.

The 1930s

⁶⁰ *VI Vserossiskii s"ezd RKSM*, 336-337, and *VII Vserossiskii s"ezd RKSM*, 466-467, as quoted in Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, 133-134; Fitzpatrick, *Social Mobility*, 27-28.

While the twenties had been a time of invention and experimentation for the Pioneer organization, the decade of the thirties brought a different sort of change to the organization. Structurally, the group changed very little, but in the early part of the 1930s, the Pioneers experienced an abrupt shift in activities and authority which mirrored broader changes within Stalinist society. In the late thirties, as an organization directly linked to the Party, yet drawing from the population at large, the Pioneers experienced the Purges from a unique perspective. Throughout the decade, the Pioneers underwent a gradual “Stalinization,” as Comrade Stalin loomed ever larger in the lives and lore of the Pioneer children.

The decade of the thirties opened with an upsurge in interest and growth for the Pioneer organization. The Pioneers experienced explosive growth in the thirties. Official membership in 1930 was 3,223,000; it rose to a reported 13 million in 1939.⁶¹ Among all children ages ten to fourteen in the Soviet Union, Pioneer membership grew from 19 percent in 1930 to 59.8 percent in 1939.⁶² Approximately half of the Pioneers came from peasant families, one-third from

⁶¹ Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, Appendix H.

⁶² Mickiewicz, *Handbook*, 52. Figures from the 1939 census (21,735,000) compared to Pioneer membership statistics from 1939 (13,000,000). 1939 census figures are estimated from official data from the census, as reported in *Vestnik statistiki*, 1956, No. 6, 89-90, and *Itogi vsesoyuznoi perepisi naselenia 1959 goda*, USSR Summary Volume, (Moscow: 1962), 49. Pioneer membership exceeded Komsomol membership by more than four times. Komsomol membership in 1936 was 3,981,777. Komsomol figures from S. E. Vavilov, ed., *BSE Ezhegodnik, 1957-1969*, in *ibid.*, 169.

workers' families, and one-sixth from "other" origins; of these, two-fifths were female and three-fifths, male.⁶³

The organization's growth was perhaps based on zeal for the new state goals of industrialization and collectivization as well as the principles of class struggle that accompanied them, which allowed the relatively "new" Pioneers to flout traditional sources of authority. Certainly the activities reportedly undertaken by Pioneers during the early 1930s reflect the flurry of activity surrounding the adoption of the first Five-Year Plan, including the collectivization drive. A 1931 investigation in Moscow revealed that Pioneers could be overburdened with social and political tasks, reporting that "a Pioneer in grade IV has twenty-eight hours of study and thirty to thirty-two hours of social work in the ten-day week."⁶⁴

Pioneers participated in a long list of activities during the early thirties. They collected minerals and scrap metal for use in industrialization, conducted campaigns against uncleanness among workers, organized day care for children of workers and peasants, helped in collective farm tasks, exposed idle workers and kulaks, sold lottery tickets, solicited subscriptions for loans, collected money to build tractors, helped to bring in the harvest, conducted political agitation on the *kolkhozi*, organized children's collective farms, cleared litter, worked on construction projects, formed shock brigades for factory and farm work, gave

⁶³ Webb, *Soviet Communism*, 402.

⁶⁴ Fitzpatrick, *Social Mobility*, 153.

political speeches, and marched in parades.⁶⁵ Reflecting Stalin's new penchant for rewarding overachieving workers, Tadjik Pioneer Mamlakat Naxhangova was awarded the Order of Lenin for picking several tons of cotton in one season.⁶⁶ So visible – and disliked – were the young enthusiasts on the collective farms, that one contemporary rumor among peasants gleefully alleged that, in one village, “God sent a storm that carried away all the *kolkhozniki* and Pioneers.”⁶⁷

The extent to which all Pioneers participated in such activities remains a question; however, the perception was that Pioneers “do anything but study.”⁶⁸ This changed suddenly in the early 1930s. In 1931, Stalin reinstated traditional educational practices and curriculum content, effectively silencing the Pioneers' call for “socially useful work” and “education of the environment” – as well as their enthusiastic class struggle against suspect teachers. Building upon Sheila Fitzpatrick's argument that the social mobility created by the Cultural Revolution spawned a new intelligentsia (*vydvizhenets*) from the working class which yearned for traditional culture, Larry Holmes contends that Stalin's decision was based on popular opinion, concluding that “a revolutionary state must eventually accommodate the desires of some of its citizens and the persistence of traditional

⁶⁵ See *IX Vsesoiuznii s'ezd VLKSM*, 357-360, 361-362, 365-368, as quoted in Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, 168-169; Fitzpatrick, *Social Mobility*, 153; and Webb, *Soviet Communism*, 405. After listing several of these activities, Webb concludes: “In short, the enthusiastic Pioneer is apt to be, at any rate during certain years, a bit of a prig!”

⁶⁶ Furin, *The World of Young Pioneers*, 49.

⁶⁷ Fitzpatrick, *Social Mobility*, 171.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

values.”⁶⁹ Another reason for Stalin’s about-face is more pragmatic: industrialization required an educated workforce. The skills needed to build socialism could not be acquired by leading a demonstration on a *kolkhoz* or by exhorting workers to stop drinking. Thus, the state mandated a return to a traditional educational system.

Inherent in traditional education was the authority of the teacher in his or her classroom. During the twenties and thirties, the Pioneers challenged this authority, individually and collectively. In 1932, however, the Central Committee decreed that the Pioneers should direct their energies toward being good students, cease criticism of teachers, and attend school on a regular basis.⁷⁰ To bind the Pioneers even more intimately to the school, the base of Pioneer work was shifted from factories and farms to schools.⁷¹ For the rest of the organization’s existence, detachment and link affiliation were headquartered and centered in the school a Pioneer attended; each classroom comprised a link, each grade made up a detachment, and each school, a brigade. Cooperation with teachers was emphasized, as well as good grades and good behavior. The military hero Semyon Budyenni made a speaking tour in Russian schools, encouraging

⁶⁹ Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse*, 252. An interesting example of Fitzpatrick’s argument concerns Pasha Angelina, the famous female tractor driver who was awarded the title of Hero of Labor in the early 1930s. Her title earned her material compensation and a higher position in society. In an interview a few years later, she pointed with pride to her children’s accomplishments: they could recite Pushkin and play the piano, among other things. Note the absence of any mention of “labor”; instead, it follows that because Pasha “worked,” her children could have “culture.” Fitzpatrick, *Social Mobility*, 252.

⁷⁰ Counts, *The Challenge of Soviet Education*, 71.

⁷¹ *X Vsesoiuznii s’ezd*, 195, as quoted in Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, 201.

Pioneers to establish good study habits and demonstrate respect for their elders.⁷²

Jointly, Narkompros and the Komsomol's Central Committee actually *discouraged* Pioneers from engaging in work outside the school which detracted from their studies. New rules dictated that no meetings could be held after 8 o'clock in the evening and free days were to be used for recreational purposes. Rather than challenging the teachers' authority, Pioneers were responsible for helping the teacher to maintain order and discipline in the school.⁷³ Even Krupskaja, who had helped to create the organization and its goals, now asserted that "the close identification of the Pioneer organization with school life and work is its main strength. . . . It is incorrect to assume that the movement has priority over the school."⁷⁴ Thus, the struggle to determine the role of the Pioneer in schools, which raged during the first decade of the organization's existence, was settled by 1932.

Concomitant with the move of the Pioneers into the sphere of the school arose the tradition of identifying the Pioneer "hero," a child who performed exemplary feats and could be held up as worthy of emulation by all Pioneers. The first of these Pioneer heroes, Pavlik Morozov, is undoubtedly the most notorious. The story goes that Pavlik, a Pioneer in a small village in the Urals, realized that

⁷² *Ibid.*, 372, 354-377, as quoted in Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, 201; Counts, *The Challenge of Soviet Education*, 73.

⁷³ Fitzpatrick, *Social Mobility*, 223.

⁷⁴ *Communist Upbringing of Successors* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1934), 121-126, as printed in Redl, *Soviet Educators on Soviet Education*, 226.

his father was committing crimes against the state (either hoarding grain or helping kulaks, the stories vary), and turned him into the secret police as an enemy of the people. Subsequently, Pavlik and his little brother were murdered by male relatives for “snitching.” Instantly, propaganda about the Morozov case flooded the press, and film scripts, plays, books, posters, and poetry took up the story. The first poem published on the Morozov case, by Mikhail Doroshin, concludes:

Muter and muter
Stand the woods round the boys.
Pavlusha won't be going
To the Pioneers anymore.
Joyful and curly,
He won't come to school.
But his great glory
Will outlive everything.
“Pavlik is with us,
Pashka the Communist!”
Out in front, like a banner,
Friendly and merry.
(That's how

Everyone should live).
How much
Every schoolchild
Resembles him
Somehow.
All of their shirts
Are abloom with red ties:
“Pashka! Pashka! Pashka!
Here! There! Everywhere!”⁷⁵

Pavlik’s devotion to the Party, honesty, and courage made him a “shining example to all the children of the Soviet Union.”⁷⁶ Thousands of letters from Pioneers across the country poured into Moscow, demanding that Pavlik’s murderers be executed (which, in fact, they were).⁷⁷

There is overwhelming evidence that the entire story about Pavlik Morozov was fabricated by the state. In *Informer 001: The Myth of Pavlik Morozov*, a work which circulated in *samizdat* prior to its publication in the late

⁷⁵ “Pavlik Morozov. Iz *poemy a nenavisti*,” *Pionerskaia Pravda*, 29 March 1933, as printed in James von Geldern and Richard Stities, eds., *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: tales, poems, songs, movies, plays, and folklore, 1917-1953*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 156. Sergei Eisenstein made a movie about Pavlik Morozov entitled *Bezhin Lug*, but the movie was apparently never released. See Druzhnikov, *Informer 001*, 97ff, and Robert Thurston, “The Soviet Family During the Great Terror, 1935-1941,” *Soviet Studies*, 43, no. 3 (1991): 559-560.

⁷⁶ *Pionerskaia Pravda*, 17 December 1932, as quoted in Yuri Druzhnikov, *Informer 001: The Myth of Pavlik Morozov* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 97.

⁷⁷ Druzhnikov, *Informer 001*, 93.

1980s, Yuri Druzhnikov points out many inconsistencies between the reality and the story broadcast about Morozov and his death. For example, Pavlik was not a Pioneer – there was not even a Pioneer detachment in his village – nor was he the first child to be murdered for turning in a family member.⁷⁸ The important point, according to Druzhnikov, is Stalin’s manipulation of this story at this particular moment in time. “By transforming the boy into a Pioneer, and ultimately into a Pioneer leader and representative of the Revolutionary organization of Young Leninists, the state was able to claim that his murderers were political terrorists.”⁷⁹ Pavlik Morozov was chosen as “the one” because he was, ironically, in the right place at the right time. Druzhnikov argues that the Morozov myth “had to appear at the time when he became necessary to the political campaign. And we know that he did appear precisely when he was needed: on the eve of a monumental wave of mass repression.”⁸⁰

The repression Druzhnikov refers to was, of course, the Great Terror. While his argument appears to concur with the escalation of terror in the thirties, it nonetheless challenges us to question Stalin’s reasons for bringing the Pioneers into the campaign against enemies of the state. Pavlik Morozov was an example for children to follow, not adults; what role would children play in the Terror?

⁷⁸ Ibid., 48, 134. Other interesting facts about Pavlik alleged by Druzhnikov include: he was a poor student, disliked by the village, he was never called “Pavlik” by anyone in his family or village, and he probably made up the story about his father because his father had left him and his mother for another woman.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 51.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 134.

Pionerskaia Pravda offered an immediate answer:

Pavlik Morozov decided upon a great exploit – to give his life for his country. He gathered together his spiritual strength and courage and acted against even his father after it had turned out that the latter was an enemy of the people. . . . For us, Pavlik Morozov will stand forever as a great example of civic courage. We must unmask the enemies of Soviet state wherever they are and whoever they are as Pavlik Morozov unmasked them.⁸¹

No child likes a snitch – or, for that matter, to be a victim of murder – but the state compensated for this by cloaking the mission in heroic, patriotic rhetoric. The state proposed that Pioneers become “unmaskers” of the enemy, an attractive proposition for a child – covert, a little romantic, and certainly important. Those children choosing loyalty to Party over loyalty to family could be heroes, just like Pavlik. Thus, while removing Pioneers from excessive participation in economic tasks such as industrialization and collectivization to the, ostensibly, confining walls of the school, the state bestowed a new task upon the Pioneers, even more important than the last.

⁸¹ *Pionerskaia Pravda*, 23 December 1932, as quoted in W. W. Kulski, *The Soviet Regime: Communism in Practice* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1959), 322.

The Pavlik myth and its themes, the elevation of Party allegiance over family or community ties and the exposure of “enemies” in society, foreshadowed the Great Terror, which peaked in intensity in 1937-38. As a mass organization, the Pioneers experienced the Terror in a way quite different from other segments of society. More than any other group, the Pioneers formed a direct link between the Party and the population at large. While there seem to be parts of the populace that led relatively normal lives during the Purges, the Terror fell particularly hard on members of the Party and the intelligentsia. The Pioneers served as a point of contact between the affected and non-affected; even for those whose families would not have been necessarily hard-hit, simply being a member of the Pioneer organization ensured that those children would be a part of the Terror, whether by participation, observation, or association. Massive repressions of former and contemporary Pioneer leaders occurred during the Terror.⁸² Rhetoric of the Purges found its way into Pioneer detachment and link meetings. One story tells of the thirteen-year-old daughter

⁸² Vladimir Andreevich Kudinov, “Obshchestvenno dvizheniia i organizatsii detei i molodezhi v Rossii v XX veke,” (Diss., Kostromskaia Sel’skokhoziaistvennaia Akademiia, 1994), 352ff. Every person who had ever occupied the top position in the Central Bureau of Young Pioneers was repressed during the Terror, including Nikolai Pavlovich Chaplin, the first leader of the “Bureau for Work Among Children” in the Central Committee of the Komsomol (arrested in ’37, shot in ’38) and Sergei Aleksandrovich Saltanov, a Komsomol enthusiast who worked intimately with the Pioneer organization (arrested and shot in ’37). Druzhnikov notes that the two Party members most responsible for launching the Pavlik Morozov propaganda drive, Pavel Postyshev and Alexander Kosarev, were also denounced and killed during the Terror. Druzhnikov, *Informer 001*, 140.

of an NKVD operative who was required to speak at a Pioneer meeting saying she approved of the shooting of her parents, as they were both spies.⁸³

Some Pioneers were more directly affected than others; youth did not protect one from arrest or death during the Terror. The decree of April 7, 1935, allowed children over twelve to be punished by death, and some were. The fourteen-year-old Pioneer son of Georgian communist Nestor Lakoba was shot. When the last of the Trotskyites and oppositionists were shot in the camps in '38, "the killing extended down to twelve-year-olds."⁸⁴ In the Children's Plot "uncovered" in the town of Leninsk-Kuznetsk, the NKVD arrested 160 children, most of whom were between the ages of twelve and fourteen, and through severe interrogation, obtained confessions to espionage, terror, treason, and links with the Gestapo. One ten-year-old admitted to membership in a fascist organization from the age of seven!⁸⁵

In essence, the Pioneers could not escape the Terror, literally and figuratively. And, as the decade progressed, it became more and more difficult for children to "escape" membership in the Pioneers. Though theoretically a voluntary organization, the decision to join the Pioneers became less of a decision and more of an assumption. One writer explained, "There is no

⁸³ Geoffrey Hosking, *The First Socialist Society: A History of the Soviet Union From Within* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 188.

⁸⁴ Pyotr Yakir, *A Childhood in Prison*, 1st American edition (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc., 1973), 11.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

evading the ‘Pioneers’; literally every Soviet boy and girl must pass through this school of Communist discipline . . .”⁸⁶ State propaganda described life outside the Pioneers thus:

Vanya is lonesome; there is no one to play with him, so he mopes at the window. On the other side of the street he sees a group of Pioneers and wishes he could be with them. Are there many children thus inactive and unhappy like Vanya? Many indeed! In order not to be so, they must organize. . . . Children will live happily, interestingly, fully, when they are organized.⁸⁷

Note the fact that Vanya cannot play with the Pioneers unless he *becomes* a Pioneer; subtle peer pressure from within and without convinced many to join. Becoming a Pioneer did not necessitate radical political action or sincere belief in communist ideals: Elena Bonner had a childhood friend who was a Pioneer, but also wore a chain with a cross on it, “wrapped around her slip strap.”⁸⁸ Bonner

⁸⁶ Hermann Rajamaa, *The Moulding of Soviet Citizens: A Glance at Soviet Educational Theory and Practice* (London: Boreas Publishing Company, Ltd., 1948), 48.

⁸⁷ T. Woody, *New Minds? New Men?* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1932), 113-114, as quoted in Schlesinger, “The Pioneer Organization,” 132.

⁸⁸ Elena Bonner, *Mothers and Daughters*, trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 203.

remembers two categories of Pioneer – active and inactive – but the implication remains that everyone in her grade was a member of the organization.⁸⁹

Further, the canonization of Pavlik Morozov demonstrated to Soviet children that while one might not be able to trust one's biological father, a more significant Father deserved their respect and faith. During the thirties, the Pioneer organization became a prominent advocate of the cult of Stalin. The year 1935 marked a turn in state propaganda which depicted Stalin as family man, caring father, and paternal protector.⁹⁰ On parade in Red Square, Pioneers carried banners proclaiming, "Greetings to Comrade Stalin, the Pioneers' Best Friend!" and "Thank you, Comrade Stalin, for our happy life!" while Stalin posed for pictures with his daughter Svetlana and other children.⁹¹ The introduction of this paternal image coincided, for many Pioneers, with the arrests and deaths of their own parents; the Party promised a surrogate family for these orphans: the state, Grandfather Lenin, and most importantly, the benevolent father, Stalin.

The ceremonies of the Pioneer organization also reflected this Stalinization process. In the oath taken upon initiation into the group, Pioneers began to promise to "stand for the cause of Lenin *and Stalin* [my emphasis] for

⁸⁹Ibid., 224.

⁹⁰ Mikhail and Aleksandr Nekrich Heller, *Utopia in Power: The History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Present*, trans. Phyllis B. Carlos (New York: Summit Books, 1986), 281-282.

⁹¹ One of the most famous pictures is of Stalin and a little girl who is presenting him with a bouquet of flowers. The girl is Gelya Markizova; ironically, her father and mother had been declared enemies of the people. Her father had been shot and her mother had been arrested. Ibid.

the victory of communism.” Likewise, the cause of Lenin and Stalin replaced the “cause of the working class” in the Pioneer challenge to be “Always ready!”⁹² Like the rest of the Party, the Pioneer programs became swept up in enthusiasm for Stalin. By the late 1930s, even Lenin’s name would disappear from the oath and the charge, and Pioneers would swear to uphold Stalin’s cause, whatever that entailed.

The children’s book *Timur and His Team* (*Timur i ego komanda*) by beloved author Arkady Gaidar appeared in the Soviet Union in 1938. The story, set in wartime Russia, revolves around a group of children who band together to “take care of business” while the men of the town are gone fighting in the war. They maintain order, see that younger children go to school, and most importantly, take care of the wives and families of soldiers, chopping wood, carrying water, babysitting, and so on. *Timur and His Team* became an instant classic. Scores of Pioneers became *timurovtsy* and tried to imitate the actions of the main character in the book. Little did these Pioneers know that their play-acting would soon become a reality as Germany descended on the Soviet Union.

War, or at least the discussion of it, was not foreign to the Pioneers. As stated earlier, military language dominated the Pioneer organization. Often the children were exhorted to “storm the front” or “mobilize” on behalf of a political

⁹² *Pionerskaia organizatsia imeni lenina* (Moskva: UchPedGiz, 1950), 41, as quoted in Schlesinger, “The Pioneer Organization,” 84. My emphasis.

campaign.⁹³ Some of the Pioneer camps ran according to a military-like system, organizing campers into platoons, companies, and battalions, handing out khaki uniforms, conducting night drills, and even surrounding the camp with barbed wire.⁹⁴ Games began to take on a military character, calling for strategies and skills such as map-making, stealth, and marksmanship. Some Pioneers trained dogs and horses for the Red Army; others became “Friends of the Border Guards”, learning about the tasks involved in defending the Soviet Union’s frontiers.⁹⁵ In the late thirties, some Pioneers met orphans from the Spanish Republic, brought to be housed in children’s homes in the Soviet Union.

Soviet children certainly were familiar with the war and Russia’s role in it as well as the rise of fascism in Europe. Several memoirists, recalling the years just prior to the Great Patriotic War, mention learning the song “If Tomorrow War Should Come” in school. The song, from a 1938 film of the same title, asserts the certain victory of the Soviet nation over any future war with the fascists. The refrain exhorts: “If tomorrow war should come, if tomorrow battle should come/Be prepared for battle today.”⁹⁶

⁹³ For example, *Mobilizuem na front tekhniki pionerskie batal’ony: obrashchenie TSB DKO ko vsem pioneram, ko vsem detiam trudiashchikhsia SSSR* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1931).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 170-172.

⁹⁵ *BSE*, s.v. “Lenin All-Union Pioneer Organization,” 244.

⁹⁶ Boris Turganov, *Pesni strany sovetov* (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1940), 88-90. Song by V. Lebedev-Kumach.

And yet, the immediacy of war should not be unduly exaggerated.

Though World War II began in the late 1930s, Pioneer attention to the war outside of the Soviet Union was negligible. A perusal of *Pionerskaia Pravda* from early 1941 supports this view. The January 11th issue, for example, highlights a film festival, discusses military exercises by students in Kishinev, Moldova, recounts the opening of a meteorological station, and commemorates the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of famed pilot Sergei Utochkin. There is no mention of the war. In fact, the only related article is a small feature on the back page which describes an economic agreement between the Soviet Union and Germany.⁹⁷

February issues are similarly absent of specifics about World War II. A February 6th article, illustrated with a map, mentions that the English were fighting the Italians in Eritrea.⁹⁸ A quarter page feature entitled “International Telegraph” in the February 8th issue peppers the reader with random war-related snippets: the Battle of Malta was going on, the English had taken Benghazi, a flu epidemic raged in Western Europe, some military activities were going on in the Sahara Desert, and thousands of homeless children roamed Europe.⁹⁹ Articles about sports competitions and an all-union Pioneer game, tributes to various Party leaders (including Kliment Voroshilov, on his 60th birthday), science fiction short stories, and features on good scholarship were far more common and took up far

⁹⁷ *PP*, 11 January 1941, No. 5 (2517). The article mentioned is “Zakliuchenie khoziaistvennogo soglasheniia mezhdru SSSR i Germanei” on page 4.

⁹⁸ *PP*, 6 February 1941, No. 16 (2528), 2.

⁹⁹ *PP*, 8 February 1941, No. 17 (2529), 2.

more space than did any detailed descriptions of the war.¹⁰⁰ Thus, “war” in the abstract was a regular part of the Pioneer program; the realities of actual, lived, contemporary war were not.

Following a decade of laying foundations, the thirties marked a time of refocusing and tremendous expansion for the Pioneer organization. Yanked from their position on the “frontline” of the industrialization and collectivization drives of the early 1930s, the Pioneers shifted their focus to the classroom, organizing brigades around neighborhood or village schools. While circle and educational work continued, the Pioneers were handed their first hero, Pavlik Morozov, as well as a charge to join the Party in vigilance against enemies of the people. Caught up in the Terror in a unique way, the Pioneers straddled the line between the Party and the rest of the population. The Pioneers increasingly served as Stalin’s cheerleaders, as living testaments to the happy life Stalinism was creating for the Soviet people. By the end of the decade, with the threat of impending conflict, the organization exhorted children to prepare for a glorious war, though without exaggerated urgency. Good conduct and school performance, in traditional subjects, in traditional classrooms, remained prescribed behaviors for Soviet children.

¹⁰⁰ *PP*, 4 February 1941, No. 15 (2527); *PP* 6 February 1941, No. 16 (2528); *PP* 8 February 1941, No. 17 (2529), include the articles mentioned here and exemplify the point made.

CHAPTER 3

LIVING THE WAR: THE EXPERIENCE OF CHILDREN, 1941-1945

Death was everywhere . . . it must be coming back for me.

Elena Kozhina, age 10¹

For the Soviet population, the Great Patriotic War was nothing short of disastrous. Though conditions of the war varied dramatically based on location and proximity to the enemy, the lives of all Soviet men, women, and children were affected by the war to some degree. In an effort to recreate the context in which the Young Pioneer organization operated, what follows describes a variety of wartime experiences in the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1945. Rather than catalogue a comprehensive list of the atrocities, deprivation, and difficulties visited upon the Soviet population, however, it is important to briefly describe and discuss the conditions particularly relevant to children in order to more fully appreciate the environment in which the Young Pioneers conducted their work.

* * *

Occupied Territory

For the first two to three years of the war, the Germans occupied approximately 900,000 square miles (1,440,000 sq km) of heavily-populated

¹ Elena Fedorovna Kozhina, *Through the Burning Steppe: A Wartime Memoir* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2000), 129.

portions of the Soviet Union, including Ukraine, Belorussia, eastern Poland, the Baltics, and western Russia, from south of Stavropol in the Caucasus to Leningrad in the north. Soviets living in occupied territory faced what one British observer described as “a deliberate policy of extermination . . . devoid of the slightest trace of human feeling.”² The Nazis burned hundreds of villages and executed suspected communists and Jews in an attempt to intimidate and pacify. Children suffered and witnessed such atrocities. Soviet people in occupied territories were tortured, beaten, shot, hung, buried alive, drowned, burned.³

Children were certainly not spared as SS *Einsatzgruppen* units pursued and brutally decimated Jewish communities in Belorussia, Ukraine, and Russia.⁴ By the autumn of 1941, the mobile killing units who had previously targeted male Jews of draft age for execution turned to the annihilation of Jewish women, children, and the elderly on the orders of Heinrich Himmler.⁵ Whereas Jewish communities in western and central Europe were rounded up and transported to

² Paul Winterton (Andrew Garve), *Eye-witness on the Soviet War-Front: Speech made London, May 19, 1943* (London: Russia Today Society, 1943), 6.

³ See, for example, accounts and letters by children from Smolensk oblast and Moskovskaia oblast, TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2761, l. 2 and TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 32, d. 95, l. 208-209 in I. F. Astrakhantseva and V. V. Khorunzhii, *Po obe storony fronta -- : molodezh' v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine: sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Moskva: TsKhDMO, Rossiiskaia gosudarstvennaia iunosheskaia biblioteka, 1994), ch.1, 51-53, ch. 2, 71-73; see also, RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 32, d. 95, l. 5, 16, 17, 206, 208, 211, 214, and RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 53, d. 277, l. 87 ob.

⁴ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 53, d. 277, l. 87ob. describes the atrocities committed in Kharkov. See also, RGALI f. 1710, op. 3, d. 50, for war correspondent Vasily Grossman's notes on the murder of Jews in Elista (Kalmykia), in Antony Beevor and Luba Vinogradova, eds. and trans., *A Writer at War: Vasily Grossman with the Red Army, 1941-1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2005), 208; Winterton, 6-7. Grossman's notebooks and the RGASPI report both note that many Jewish children were killed by smearing an unknown poison/compound on their lips.

⁵ Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-44* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 34, 41.

concentration or extermination camps, large-scale, public, mass shootings were far more typical on the Eastern Front.⁶ Children were among the more than 30,000 victims massacred at Babi Yar outside Kiev September 29-30, 1941, and subsequent mass killings at Rovno, Krivoi Rog, and Dnepropetrovsk. Thirteen-year-old Jacob Lipszyc witnessed the slaughter of thousands of Jews in Mir (Belorussia), including his mother, brother, and sister, as commandos positioned at each corner of a town square opened fire on a crowd of people rounded up for just such a purpose.⁷ Near the end of 1941, remaining Jews – a large proportion of which were women and children – were rounded up and placed in ghettos, particularly in areas under German civil administration in western Ukraine and western Belorussia. A majority of these people were killed as these ghettos were liquidated in the “Second Wave” actions of 1942 and 1943. Though directed by the Nazis, these actions were by and large carried out by local police units, many of whom volunteered to ferret out and turn in Jews in hiding.⁸ In Radomyshl, adult Jews were shot to death by *Einsatzgruppen* commandos, but Ukrainian police stepped in to shoot the Jewish children.⁹ The rest of the community, fearing German reprisals or inspired by anti-semitic feeling, ostracized them,

⁶ Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 62.

⁷ Special Archive, Moscow 1323-2-255, p. 22-3 *KdG* Zhitomir, 23 September 1942, in Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 47.

⁸ Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 101.

⁹ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, rev. ed. vol. 1 (New York, 1985), 314, citing *Ereignismeldung UdSSR* 88 (September 19, 1941), in Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 64. Berkhoff admits this appears to have been an exceptional case.

despite witnessing the beatings, starvation, and death of former neighbors.¹⁰

Imagine the feelings of confusion and betrayal that children must have felt, driven to torture and death by adults whom they had known as fellow citizens and townspeople.

By late 1942, when partisan activity began to disrupt German military operations, children could be targeted for abuse or death for alleged (or real) aid to the elusive resistance. Even ignorance could not save some from death. Elena Kozhina remembers seeing a young boy

maybe thirteen or fourteen years old . . . sleeping like a child. All the more horrible was this child's sleep . . . his fingernails had been torn off. The locals told Mama that the Germans tortured him before they shot him – he was suspected of helping some underground guerrillas. Was he helping? Everybody shrugged their shoulders. He didn't say anything under torture (maybe because he had nothing to say), so the Germans grew angry, and shot him.¹¹

¹⁰ Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 76-77. The Nazis threatened death to any people helping Jews in any way. Even those known to be communicating with Jews received warnings from the German authorities that they were subject to execution, along with their families, if it was proven they were aiding Jews in any way. This is certainly not the only factor explaining lack of action in opposing the Holocaust, but Berkhoff contends it is a primary explanation. He also considers pervasive anti-Semitism and the "culture of denunciation" cultivated by Soviet rule to be important considerations.

¹¹ Kozhina, *Through the Burning Steppe*, 80-81.

Even when daily atrocities ceased, the possibility of death lingered. Kozhina fell into a deep depression, brought on by “an awareness of the horror of all that happened to us.”¹² Imprisoned in a poultry farm-turned-prison for families of suspected Communists, Yuri Kirshin, ten years old in 1942, recalls, “Everyone – mothers and children – expected to be shot.”¹³ Curfews were strictly enforced by occupation troops. Communication with other villages or regions was almost non-existent. One had to act warily around the occupying forces. Arbitrarily, they might beat children, force them to run errands, demand sexual favors, or give out bags of candy.¹⁴ Girls in occupied villages attempted to avoid notice by wearing shapeless rags and smearing ash on their faces.¹⁵ Older children could be sent to Germany as workers, such as fourteen-year-old Olga Selezniova. In a May 1942 letter she wrote, “It would be better to die than to be here. . . . We were sold . . . as if we were slaves.”¹⁶ Vasily Grossman, war correspondent attached to the Red Army, witnessed thousands of Soviet children walking home as the German Reich crumbled. In one account, he wrote, “we saw eight hundred Soviet children walking eastwards on the road, the column stretching for many kilometers. Some soldiers and officers were standing by the

¹² Ibid., 125, 129.

¹³ Yuri Kirshin, in C. LeRoy Anderson, Joanne R. Anderson, Yunosuka Chikura, eds., *No Longer Silent: World-Wide Memories of the Children of World War II* (Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1995), 277.

¹⁴ See N. B. Dovbenko, in *ibid.*, 47; TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 53, d. 31, l. 41-41ob. in Astrakhantseva, *Po obe storony fronta*, ch. 2, 74-76; RGASPI f. M-1, op. 53, d. 277, l. 89.

¹⁵ RGALI f. 1710, op. 3, d. 49, Grossman in Beevor, *A Writer at War*, 76.

¹⁶ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 53, d. 31, l. 41 in Astrakhantseva, *Po obe storony fronta*, ch. 2, 74.

road, peering into their faces intently and silently. They were fathers looking for their children . . .”¹⁷ Tragically, liberation did not necessarily end their suffering and not all soldiers behaved as fathers seeking children. Grossman noted, regretfully, that Soviet girls returning home were molested and raped by Red Army men, one girl weeping to him, ““He was an old man, older than my father.””¹⁸

Those who remained lived in conditions not much better than those taken to Germany. Homes could be seized and some found themselves living in makeshift lean-tos or in underground holes. Kozhina lived with her mother and another family in what had previously been a dilapidated barn for two years on the Kuban steppe.¹⁹ Many children lived in attics, gardens, abandoned buildings, or forests.²⁰ People improvised clothing and foot coverings, scrounging from the deceased or nearby birch trees. Despite the rich agricultural land in occupied territory, many Soviets endured constant hunger because the Nazis commandeered food supplies for their own troops and horses. The price of food skyrocketed: in occupied Kharkov, for example, a cabbage cost 60-80 rubles, ten potatoes cost 70-80 rubles, a kilogram of butter cost 1200 rubles, and a pud of

¹⁷ Vasily Grossman, “The Road to Berlin,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, February 28, 1945, RGALI f. 1710, op. 3, d. 21, quoted in Beevor, *A Writer at War*, 330.

¹⁸ RGALI f. 1710, op. 3, f. 51, in *ibid.*, 321, 327.

¹⁹ Kozhina, *Through the Burning Steppe*.

²⁰ RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 53, d. 277, l. 87 ob.

grain cost over two thousand rubles.²¹ Shifting frontlines compounded the hardships for those in the western Soviet Union. Caught between Hitler's advance and the Soviets' scorched earth policy for the first few years, then the Germans' destructive retreat and the Red Army's pursuit in the final years of war, civilians could be swept up in the noise, confusion, and devastation of artillery attacks, air raids, tank battles, and the clash of infantry.

Under such circumstances, school seemed, as one report suggested, "out of the question."²² Though schooling was not completely absent, it was certainly dramatically disrupted and affected by the war. Without even considering the difficulties of getting children to focus on studies during an occupation, practical obstacles prevented most schools from functioning. School buildings went up in flames in some villages; in others, schools were often commandeered as headquarters for troops, both German and Soviet. A 1943 state decree ended the requisitioning of school grounds by Soviet forces, but went largely ignored until the war ceased.²³ Lack of teachers and resources also hindered attempts at education. A 1943 letter from a Pioneer troop in Leningradskaia oblast' explained that partisans had formed a school of sorts for them, but that they had no books, no paper, no pencils, or any other school supplies.²⁴ Even after

²¹ RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 53, d. 277, l. 117.

²² RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 53, d. 277, l. 88.

²³ Beatrice King, *Soviet Childhood in Wartime* (London: Russia Today Society, 1943), 165.

²⁴ Astrakhantseva, *Po obe storony fronta*, ch. 2, 26-29.

liberation by Soviet troops, this remained a problem. Kozhina returned to school in 1944 after the Kuban steppe was retaken by the Soviets; the fifteen students in her one-room school had no supplies and, Kozhina notes, attempts to teach quickly degenerated into horseplay. By age ten, she still had not learned to write. Further, the German administration in Slavic territories such as Ukraine deemed the natives unworthy of the reestablishment of even rudimentary education.²⁵ Kirshin, a native of Unecha (Briansk raion), recalls that schools were closed and other activities restricted because of the occupation.²⁶ A 1943 report on occupied Ukraine commented on the dearth of operational schools: in Kharkov, for example, only thirteen of 138 schools were open. These, the report continues, were populated only by children of office workers, police, starostas, and “other fascist lackeys.”²⁷ Local efforts by Germans to keep an edited version of school functioning were not unknown. School continued, for example, in Elista, though German officials replaced any books that discussed Soviet politics or history with magazines such as “Hitler the Liberator,” created story problems in math using downed Soviet aircraft, and added German to the curriculum. Schoolchildren could expect their bags to be searched on a regular basis and were chastised if

²⁵ Ihor Kamenetsky, *Hitler's Occupation of Ukraine, 1941-1944: A Study in Totalitarian Imperialism* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1956), 43-46, in Richard Overy, *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet War Effort: 1941-1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 133.

²⁶ Kirshin, in Anderson, *No Longer Silent*, 279.

²⁷ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 53, d. 277, l. 88, 116 ob.

anything smacked of Leninism.²⁸ Vera and Natasha Stakhanova's father, a Russian who collaborated with the Germans, was assigned the task of organizing a children's home outside Melitopol. She recalls that the orphans had "clean dormitories, food, clothes and teachers" and a mass christening sponsored by the German administration; this relatively comfortable tableau, however, lasted only about a month, as shifting frontlines forced the family's flight to the west and the abandonment of the orphanage.²⁹ Even children who managed to attend some sort of regular school, however, faced constant interference. While in his native village of Golubichi (Chernigov raion), N. P. Dovbenko recalls that because schooling was so often disrupted, students were kept in the same grades for two consecutive years.³⁰

Without school to occupy them and parents often preoccupied or absent, children had lots of free time, though not necessarily the freedom to enjoy it. One fourteen-year-old in Tul'skaia oblast' recounted that he spent his time cutting German communication cables, "[bringing] revenge as much as I could."³¹ Occasionally children served on the frontlines with the Red Army, serving as

²⁸ RGALI f. 1710, op. 3, d. 50, Grossman in Beevor, *A Writer at War*, 207-208. Grossman notes that an operational school was "not typical for the occupied territories – the Germans [on the spot] were acting on their own authority."

²⁹ Nadia Stakhanova, Natasha Stakhanova, Vera Stakhanova, with Charles Cherry, *Separated at Stavropol: A Russian Family's Memoir of Wartime Flight* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2005), 99-100.

³⁰ Dovbenko, in Anderson, *No Longer Silent*, 46. Dovbenko acknowledges that attending school at all was quite unusual. He began school – third grade – in November of 1941; in September 1942, he started third grade for the second time.

³¹ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op.32, d. 95, l. 60-61, in Astrakhanseva, *Po obe storony fronta*, ch. 2, 69-71.

informants helping to locate enemy headquarters.³² Some children joined or aided partisan bands, serving as couriers, stealing weapons, and damaging Nazi supplies.³³ Others treated, fed, or housed wounded Soviet soldiers.³⁴ The homelessness and lack of supervision that inspired some to patriotic duty created conditions conducive to delinquency for others. Children learned “to steal, to cheat, to lie, in order first to survive.”³⁵ A rise in theft and begging was noted in occupied Ukraine.³⁶ Hunger could drive one to extreme actions. In the Donbass, Grossman saw one enterprising twelve-year-old boy attempt to trade bogus intelligence information on the Germans to a Soviet regimental commander in exchange for some chicken and vodka.³⁷ In Stalingrad, starving children agreed to fill water bottles in the Volga River for the Germans in exchange for food, knowing that Soviet snipers had orders to shoot them for collaboration if they did so.³⁸ There were certainly benefits for collaborators, however short-lived: the Stakhanova children, for example, “looked healthy and tanned and had rosy cheeks. [They] played all day long . . . [and] ate the plentiful variety of fruits”

³² RGALI f. 1710, op. 3, d. 50, Grossman in Beevor, *A Writer at War*, 140. Grossman noted that a twelve-year-old boy served as a spy for the Red Army in Stalingrad, tracking headquarters by “signal cables, kitchens, and dispatch riders.”

³³ See, for example, TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 115, l. 10-11, in Astrakhantseva, *Po obe storony fronta*, ch. 2, 52-53.

³⁴ See, for example, Kozhina, *Through the Burning Steppe*, 115, or Astrakhantseva, *Po obe storony fronta*, ch. 2, 65-66, for accounts of this activity in the Black Sea region, in Belorussia, and outside Leningrad.

³⁵ King, *Russia Goes to School*, 159.

³⁶ RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 53, d. 277, l. 116 ob.

³⁷ RGALI f. 1710, op. 3, d. 49, Grossman in Beevor, *A Writer at War*, 77. The boy shared his “information” for food; while he was eating, his mother came in and promptly thrashed him for making up lies.

³⁸ Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 187.

available in southern Ukraine, while their father served the Germans there. Vera Stakhanova remembers, “Sometimes we would even forget that there was a war out there.”³⁹ Neither criminal activity nor collaboration with the enemy is surprising, considering the desperate conditions of territory overrun by the Germans.

Leningrad

There was perhaps no city in the Soviet Union as uniquely desperate as Leningrad. In limbo between German occupation and Soviet defense, the surrounded city endured a blockade from August 30, 1941, to January 27, 1944. Leningrad’s population was decimated by starvation, disease, cold, and near-constant air attacks by the Nazis, with perhaps as many as 800,000 dying in the first, horrific winter of 1941-42. Though as many as 216,000 children had been evacuated from Leningrad in the months before encirclement, hundreds of thousands of others remained.⁴⁰ As German bombs and inept Soviet planning combined to create conditions of incredible deprivation, the lives of children changed immeasurably. Everyday activities were disrupted, as, among other sites

³⁹ Stakhanova, et. al., *Separated at Stavropol*, 100-101. It should be noted that this idyllic period in Vera’s life was fleeting; she and her family suffered years of hardship, attached to the Cossack army which fought for Germany, attempting to flee west, and managing to escape repatriation.

⁴⁰ Overy, *Russia’s War*, 103. Harrison Salisbury writes that there were at least 700,000 individuals still holding dependent ration cards in the first quarter of 1942. Children up to the age of fourteen were classified as dependents. Even accounting for fraud and bureaucratic mistakes, the number of children in the city remained in the hundreds of thousands. Salisbury, *The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad*, reprint ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1985), 492.

such as hospitals, the Hermitage, and libraries, the Germans destroyed schools and the Pioneer Palace with artillery.⁴¹ Kozhina recalls that by the fall of 1941, “there was not a single school left near us. Some were bombed, others converted into hospitals.”⁴² While a handful of schools may have remained open, the majority were closed for, at least, the 1941-1942 school year.⁴³ When some schools reopened, after the disastrous first winter, schooling was still rather sporadic. Evgeniia Vadimovna Shavrova recalls attending school every other day and having only three classes per day.⁴⁴

The students (and people) of Leningrad, however, were receiving a new sort of education. As early as July, the state attempted to mobilize city defense units; Salisbury notes that “youngsters eight to sixteen were to be trained to fight in hand-to-hand combat.”⁴⁵ Up to a million Leningraders were mobilized to dig anti-tank trenches, build earth and concrete pillboxes, and erect barbed-wire barricades; children, too, contributed to this effort. By September 1st,

⁴¹ Salisbury states that the Germans charted the city for artillery. Among those mentioned are firing points #736, a school on Baburin pereulok, and #192, the Pioneer Palace. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*, 373.

⁴² Kozhina, *Through the Burning Steppe*, 45-46.

⁴³ Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Fadeev, trans. R. D. Charques, *Leningrad in the Days of the Blockade* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1971), 39-46. Fadeev insists that some schools never closed during the siege – an assertion that is hard to believe considering the physical conditions of the first winter – but acknowledges that most schools remained closed until May of 1942.

⁴⁴ Shavrova’s memoirs in Cynthia Simmons and Nina Perlina, *Writing the Siege of Leningrad: Women’s Diaries, Memoirs, and Documentary Prose* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), 41-42.

⁴⁵ Salisbury, *The 900 Days*, 187.

schoolchildren had collected a million bottles for use as Molotov cocktails.⁴⁶ For survival's sake, they learned new skills. Kozhina, who was eleven at the time, remembers, "This was a time when all children, even ones younger than myself, could tell unerringly a Messerschmitt from a Focke-Wulf by sound alone, not to mention the difference between a bombing raid and an artillery attack. I was from Leningrad."⁴⁷ During the siege, witnesses recount seeing children extinguish incendiary bombs, carry water, work in truck gardens, and care for wounded soldiers.⁴⁸ After the city survived the first winter, agricultural work became increasingly important to supplement the supplies received. Shavrova remembers a "red-letter day" on October 28, 1943, when "We were awarded, along with the boys, medals 'For the Defense of Leningrad.' We were decorated for our agricultural work. . . . It means that we schoolchildren are now considered to be real defenders of the city."⁴⁹

Surviving starvation conditions in Leningrad, frankly, *was* heroic.

Dependents' rations – for young people up to age fourteen – were half those of workers. As of October 1, this meant a ration of 200 grams of bread daily;

⁴⁶ Ibid., 283.

⁴⁷ Kozhina, *Through the Burning Steppe*, 82-83.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Fadeev, *Leningrad*, 46; Salisbury, *The 900 Days*, 196, 329; V. Ivanov, *The Youth of Heroic Leningrad* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1942); Boris Skomorovsky and E. G. Morris, *The Siege of Leningrad* (New York: Books, Inc., 1944), 45; Evgeniia Vadimovna Shavrova's memoirs in Simmons, *Writing the Siege*, 44. Shavrova: "1 Feb. 1943: We have become the sponsors of a hospital on the corner of Moika and Dzerzhinskii Street . . . Our class has been assigned wards where some are even seriously wounded. We visit the soldiers almost every day, read books, write letters, fulfill various requests . . ."

⁴⁹ Shavrova, in Simmons, *Writing the Siege*, 44.

between November and December, bread rations were 125 grams a day.⁵⁰ Svetlana Magayeva, ten at the time of the siege, remembers children with huge heads, swollen stomachs, and matchstick arms and legs.⁵¹ Starvation exacerbated the effects of disease and unsanitary conditions. Fatality rates for all diseases rose drastically during the siege: from 4 percent to 60 percent for typhus and from 10 percent to 50 percent for dysentery.⁵² Death might have been a blessing for some; many children experienced the pain of outliving their own families. Vsevolod Vishnevsky, among others, recalls seeing children hauling the bodies of their dead parents on sleds through the streets of Leningrad.⁵³ Human predators of children were not unknown. Though it was a crime, adults sometimes expropriated ration cards, purporting to be “guardians” of neighborhood children.⁵⁴ In extreme cases, some children were killed for their ration cards, despite the low category into which they fell. By November of 1941, mothers kept children inside because of reports of kidnapping and cannibalism. Boys and girls were prime targets because of their youth and because their “flesh was tender.”⁵⁵ Not all children

⁵⁰ Salisbury, *The 900 Days*, 377. Dependents received half the fats, about half the cereals, and three-quarters the sweets rationed to workers. The lowest category of rations went to the fourteen to eighteen-year-olds. Their rations fell below even dependents’ rations.

⁵¹ Svetlana Magayeva and Albert Pleysier, trans. and ed., Albert Pleysier, *Surviving the Blockade of Leningrad* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 2006), 18.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 492.

⁵³ Vishnevsky, in Salisbury, *The 900 Days*, 445.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Magayeva’s story about Adick Derjugin, whose apartment manager proclaimed himself guardian of two orphans in order to claim their rations. Magayeva, *Surviving*, 76-77.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

had relatives to protect them. In order to survive, some children took to the streets, resorting to theft, risking the punishments and beatings it would entail.⁵⁶

Evacuation

Urban populations in wartorn regions of the Soviet Union declined dramatically. In Stalingrad, for example, only 12.2 percent of the population remained; in Voronezh, only 20 percent.⁵⁷ War correspondent Grossman witnessed thousands of refugees fleeing the advancing German military on the Gomel highway in the summer of 1941.⁵⁸ At the same time, over half a million Soviets were evacuated from Leningrad. Adding to the congestion was the “methodical and meticulous” deportation of over two million occupants of Poland and the Baltics to various parts of the Soviet Union between 1939 and 1941.⁵⁹ Though the evacuation of industries and essential workers has long been hailed as a major achievement of the Soviet government and a key reason for the eventual Soviet victory, the movement to and resettlement of civilians to various regions of

⁵⁶ See Salisbury, *The 900 Days*, 453, for a story about a ten-year-old boy who stole bread in the rationing office. He sat in the middle of the floor and wolfed down the bread, despite being beaten and cursed. E. I. Kochina, on the other hand, recounts “hit-and-run” thefts where older boys would steal bread much like a purse-snatcher might seize a pocketbook. Kochina, trans. Samuel C. Ramer, *Blockade Diary* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis Publishers, 1990), 55-56. Shavrova remembers that some kids found a way to “eat twice in the buffet” by illicitly reentering cafeterias in ’42 and ’43. Shavrova, in Simmons, *Writing the Siege*, 43.

⁵⁷ John Erickson, “Soviet Women at War,” in John Garrard and Carol Garrard, eds., *World War II and the Soviet People: Selected Papers from the Fourth World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies, Harrogate, 1990* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 58.

⁵⁸ Grossman in Beevor, *A Writer at War*, 23, 55.

⁵⁹ John Roy-Wojciechowski and Allan Parker, *A Strange Outcome: the Remarkable Survival Story of a Polish Child* (Auckland, NZ: Penguin Books, 2004), 280.

Russia, Central Asia, and Siberia was far from laudatory. Almost all traveled by railway on filthy, overcrowded cattle cars for hundreds or thousands of miles, not knowing where their final destinations lay. Though Poles were deported as “enemies of the people” after Soviet occupation and might be expected to receive poor treatment, Soviet evacuees report similar conditions. Kozhina, a Leningrad evacuee, remembers that on her lice-infested, disease-ridden trip, “We had lain together like sardines on wooden bunks and straw, falling asleep with the living and waking up with the dead.”⁶⁰ Elena Skryabina, another Leningrad evacuee, remembers train cars so crowded that people rode on the steps and roofs. Even the anticipation of evacuation could be stressful. Svetlana Magayeva recalls, “We had been told that only half the children who were transported along the Road of Life reached the opposite shore of the lake. The others never made it.” Few children could sleep the week before evacuation, perhaps preoccupied by accounts of children’s hats rising “like water lilies that had been dropped in the water as funeral flowers.”⁶¹ Unconfirmed memoirs relate that thousands of schoolchildren were evacuated, on foot and without food or water, in order to

⁶⁰ Kozhina, *Through the Burning Steppe*, 91. For other accounts, see Janka Goldberger, *Stalin’s Little Guest* (London: Janus, 1995); Irena Grudzińska-Gross and Jan Tomasz Gross, eds., *War Through Children’s Eyes: The Soviet Occupation of Poland and the Deportations, 1939-1941* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1981); Esther Rudomin Hautzig, *The Endless Steppe: Growing Up in Siberia* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); Lucjan Krolikowski, trans. Kazimierz J. Kozniatowski, *Stolen Childhood: A Saga of Polish War Children* (Buffalo, NY: Franciscan Fathers Minor Conventuals, 1983); Tatiana Vasil’eva, *Hostage to War: A True Story* (New York: Scholastic Press, 1997); Dorit Bader Whiteman, *Escape Via Siberia: A Jewish Child’s Odyssey of Survival* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1999).

⁶¹ Magayeva, *Surviving*, 94-95.

escape the German invasion of Kiev. The children were not allowed to tell their families good-bye, nor were they able to take anything with them. Many of them died of exhaustion along the road, while hundreds of others were driven across a minefield in Pechersk district “in order not to hand them over to the enemy” “when it became clear that it was impossible to lead them through the [German] encirclement.”⁶²

Most evacuation centers were ill-prepared to receive vast numbers of refugees, and local populations were loath to share any of their own provisions. On at least one leg of her journey, Skryabina’s family – and those traveling with her in a boxcar – was simply shunted onto a siding and forgotten.⁶³ For those who survived the journey, separation from family members and neighbors, loss of possessions – often traded for food or other essentials – and horrendous housing awaited. Many regions, particularly those in Central Asia, were ill-prepared to receive an influx of refugees. The state’s policy of allowing “free resettlement” usually meant that refugees had to find their own housing, often in areas of low population. Any village home with an extra interior wall could be rented; often three, four, or five families lived in one- or two-room houses. Anyone twelve

⁶² Halyna Lashchenko, “Povorot,” *Samostiina Ukraïna* 11, no. 10 (118) (Chicago, October 1958), 12, in Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 26. It is Berkhoff who labels these “unconfirmed memoirs.”

⁶³ Elena Skryabina, *Siege and Survival: the Odyssey of a Leningrader* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), 73, 97, 106. She notes that, with connections, evacuation conditions could be improved. With the help of a kind soldier, for example, her son was placed on a clean, uncrowded hospital train. Skryabina’s family left Gorky on a comfortable train, due to her relationship with a high-level city official. This was very obviously, however, the exception rather than the rule.

years or older was expected to report to work, either on state farms, in mines, or in factories; by 1942, “even the ten-year-olds were forced to work, weeding millet fields, poisoning gophers, and gathering manure.”⁶⁴ Again, food was a constant source of concern and anxiety as were accompanying diseases, such as avitaminosis and dysentery.

For parentless children, the difficult journey must have been especially harrowing. Based on figures from Leningrad’s evacuation, in the first year of the war it was quite likely that children traveled as groups rather than as families. For example, of the 79,826 children who passed through Yaroslavskaia oblast in 1941, 85 percent evacuated with organizations – schools, orphanages, parents’ workplace affiliation, and so on – rather than with mothers, grandparents, or siblings.⁶⁵ Children arriving at evacuation drop points received mixed reactions. Despite the assertion that people “vied with one another in efforts to assist the young evacuees,”⁶⁶ it is apparent that advanced notice and preparation for the overwhelming number of refugees was decidedly lacking. In Altai region, while some children were greeted by locals, others were simply ignored. One group of children, abandoned at the railway station in Biysk, lived there for a month before

⁶⁴ Stasia Kunicka, in Krolikowski, *Stolen Childhood*, 271.

⁶⁵ *Iaroslavtsi v godi BOB: sbornik dokumentov* (Iaroslavl’, 1960), 274-275, in V. M. Koval’chik, et. al., eds., *Strana Leningradu: 1941-1945, sbornik dokumentov* (Kishinev: Nestor-Historia, 2002), 133. The figures are from May 15, 1942: for 1941, 67,796 children with organizations, 12,030 children with parents, 79,826 total. Of these, 20,811 remained in Yaroslavskaia oblast. For 1942, the numbers are quite strikingly different – and much lower, for obvious reasons. For 1942, 5800 children with organizations, 14,991 with parents, 20,791 total; 35,087 children remained in the oblast.

⁶⁶ Skomorovsky, *The Siege of Leningrad*, 47.

attracting the attention of local officials.⁶⁷ Nine thousand Polish children were put in children's homes outside Kuibyshev, but provided with no bedding, furniture, kitchen utensils, disinfectants, or other supplies.⁶⁸ Of the 227,235 children evacuated from Leningrad by December 1941, over a quarter of them simply could not be accounted for; as far as recordkeeping goes, those children had simply vanished.⁶⁹ Small wonder: the monumental task of organizing proper records for hundreds of thousands of children – many of whom were probably in shock, ill, and disturbed by wartime experiences – would be daunting, even today. In Altai region alone, forty-three children's homes housed evacuees from Kiev, Kalinin, Smolensk, Rostov, Crimea, Dnepropetrovsk, Ordzhinikidze, Grozniy, German republics in Povolzhe, Poland, and Leningrad.⁷⁰

The children's home (*detdom*) could be a blessing or a curse. Despite the propaganda that children of the Red Army officers and men were being provided “more education, more dining-rooms, better sanatoria and rest-homes, the maximum amount of clothing and the love of the whole to compensate for their father's absence,” the resources were simply not provided to make this so.⁷¹

⁶⁷ *Altai v godi BOB. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Barnaul, 1965), 294-297, in Kovalchik, *Strana leningradu*, 171-172.

⁶⁸ Krolkowski, *Stolen Childhood*, 58-59. It should be noted that after July 30, 1941, the Polish government-in-exile and the Soviet Union signed an alliance against Germany. Stalin granted all deported Poles “amnesty” and the right to freely settle in the Soviet Union.

⁶⁹ TsGAIPD SPB f. 330, op. 1, d. 5, l. 50, in Koval'chik, *Strana leningradu*, 65-66. Of 227,235 children, 62,024 (27 percent) were unaccounted for.

⁷⁰ *Altai v godi BOB*, 294-297, in Koval'chik, *Strana leningradu*, 171-172.

⁷¹ Quote from Eleanor Fox, *Red Army Men and Their Dependents* (London: Russia Today Society, 1944), 8.

While examples of excellent children's homes existed, the majority were hampered by lack of supplies, staff, and unhealthy children. In "good" children's homes, residents could expect a highly-regimented schedule, consistent schooling, tri-weekly war briefings, defense training, volunteer agricultural work, and Pioneer activities.⁷² One suspects there were not many children's homes functioning this effectively. In a good many children's homes, the children simply ran the home as a sort of cooperative. The children chopped their own firewood, cleaned, did laundry, prepared meals, and mended clothes and linens as needed. The same report which recognized these self-serve orphanages, however, also noted that many children's homes had curtailed extracurricular activities and physical training "primarily due to lack of lighting and absence of kerosene lamps."⁷³ Most children's homes faced food shortages, forcing children to fend for themselves, planting gardens, stealing, or foraging for sufficient nourishment. The residents of one children's home simply "ate the park" nearby, leaving trees stripped of bark and buds.⁷⁴ No psychological care was provided for orphans, and, often, inadequate staff. After an inspection tour of children's homes, one Komsomol Central Committee member, Chukovskii, reported that, "At each [*detdom*] there are always three or four 'atamans' who give orders to the rest of

⁷² RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 7, d. 26, l. 51-53 and 170-171. No specific *detdoms* are pointed out as being exemplary, or as possessing all these qualities in this report.

⁷³ RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 7, d. 26, l. 14ob.

⁷⁴ Rachel Green, "Everyday Life in Soviet Orphanages, 1941-1956," Paper presented at the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies National Convention, Salt Lake City, Utah, November 3-6, 2005.

the children and make them steal and sell things. Mass raping of girls is a norm in those places.” He goes on to describe the gang-rape of an eleven-year-old girl at a children’s home in Uzbekistan.⁷⁵

Most children’s homes were neither the picture of perfection nor dens of iniquity, but a bit of both. Svetlana Magayeva paints a complex, detailed portrait of life in a children’s home, based on her experiences in 1941-1942. She was fed – generally bread, three times a day, gruel twice a day, and tea twice a day. In the same home where troublemakers fought, teased, stole, and humiliated other children, a teenage resident, ill from dystrophy, “nursed” his toddler-aged brother to sleep each night because it was the only means of pacifying him. In the same home where a child was murdered because he witnessed theft from the pantry, a ten-year-old took on the role of nurse/monitor to dozens of sick children, trying to help them recover enough to be evacuated.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 18. The date of the report is 9/7/42. It may be important to note the extraordinary nature of this comment. The report in which it is included is a stenographic account of a roundtable of Komsomol leaders responsible for overseeing the Young Pioneer organization. Though others lament conditions in *detdomi*, none other than Chukovskii note such criminal, violent behavior. Neither did I read any other reports of children’s homes where mass rape and criminal activity were “the norm.” There might be several explanations for this. If Chukovskii is speaking truthfully, he may have witnessed an exceptional children’s home and generalized, or he may have genuinely seen several depraved children’s homes. Others may not have felt free to express the same ideas he did, considering the Party pledge to care for the children of the nation. It is also very possible that other documents containing similar accusations have not yet been declassified. Chukovskii may have been lying or exaggerating the conditions he witnessed, although his motivation is less than clear. The Pioneer organization was in shambles at this point in 1942, as will be discussed later; perhaps Chukovskii wanted to point out its failures in a graphic manner, though how he might have benefited from this is unclear. He gained no particular position in Komsomol (or Pioneer) leadership in subsequent years.

⁷⁶ Magayeva, *Surviving*, 70, 75, 78, 91, 95.

Behind the Frontlines

Conditions in children's homes reflected day-to-day conditions and concerns on the homefront. In Soviet-held territory, beyond the reach of the Germans (though not much beyond, as in the case of Moscow), the population struggled to feed and clothe themselves, to live any semblance of a normal life. Certainly, deprivation was nothing new to the Soviet people; rationing had been used in various locales during the 1930s, housing had been in short supply since the revolution, and consumer goods were scarce before the war began.⁷⁷ The war simply exacerbated these conditions, particularly in the first few years. The bread ration in Lenger-Ugol, Kazakhstan, in the fall of 1941 was 400 grams/day, if one could get it before the state stores ran out – a daily occurrence, according to one young witness.⁷⁸ In Gorky, promised rations were rarely provided; on the black market, people traded whatever they had – clothes, furniture, kitchen goods, their bodies – for food from peasants or kolkhoz workers.⁷⁹ Elena Skryabina, a 1942 evacuee from Leningrad, witnessed shortages from north Russia to the Urals

⁷⁷ See, for example, a woman's letter to NKVD chief Yagoda in 1940. She complains that even though she has the money to buy them, she cannot buy shoes in Moscow for her nine-year-old child because none are available "even in the Lux shops." GARF f. R-5446, op. 82, d. 137, ll. 8-8ob., in A. Ia. Livshin and I. V. Orlov, *Sovetskaia povsednevnost' i massovoe soznanie, 1939-1945* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2003), 172-173. See also, Nina Lugovskaia, *The Diary of a Soviet Schoolgirl, 1932-1937* (Moscow: Glas New Russian Writing, 2003), 59ff, for discussion of food and commodities shortages in Moscow in the 1930s.

⁷⁸ Goldberger, *Stalin's Little Guest*, 94. Hautzig remembers daily rations of 300 grams and a piece of cheese in Rubtsovsk, Siberia. Hautzig, *The Endless Steppe*, 53.

⁷⁹ Tobien, *Dancing*, 121. Though Tobien's "memoir" has some problems, this is substantiated by other more reliable sources. See, for example, Skryabina, *Siege and Survival*, 102-103.

region to central Russia to the Caucasus - in Cherepovets, Vologda, Perm, Gorky, Liske, Pyatigorsk – despite the people’s and state’s efforts to provide for them.⁸⁰ The state had closed all local markets and forbidden the sale of local foodstuffs, to direct the bulk of produce to the front, and this remained the rule until the summer of 1942. After that, food was either in short supply or too expensive for most to afford. In Moscow, bread could be had, “but very little else” and “fuel . . . [was] very short.”⁸¹ The scarcity of fuel was felt by all but the most privileged. Children and adults snuck pieces of fence, wood from lumberyards, or coal dropped near railroad tracks or factory grounds to warm themselves.⁸²

These shortages dramatically affected schools and school attendance on the homefront. Very little schooling occurred in the first year of the war, due to evacuations, shortages of fuel, and lack of teachers. Even Moscow closed all of its primary schools during the first year of the war, though some secondary schools reportedly remained open. By 1942, school seems to have resumed in most unoccupied parts of the Soviet Union, though attendance was certainly

⁸⁰ Skrjabina, *Siege and Survival*, 82, 102, 106, 116-118, 124. For example, Skrjabina writes, “The population of Pyatigorsk is also starving. The only thing that saves them is the small garden plots where they have planted different types of vegetables. Some have relatives living in the country, who supply them with fruits and dairy products, but these are the exceptions. The prices on the market are so high that they are completely inaccessible to the inhabitants. The rations authorized by cards are so minimal that it is not even worth talking about.” It should also be noted that everywhere she traveled (including Leningrad), she observed a few well-fed, thriving men, women, and children – those who held high-level jobs (i.e., an NKVD official, an administrator in Gorky) or were connected with institutions receiving rations (i.e., director of hospital, director of food warehouse).

⁸¹ Winterton, *Eye-witness*, 9.

⁸² See, for example, Hautzig, *The Endless Steppe*, 147.

hampered by wartime conditions.⁸³ According to a 1943 Gosplan report, the student population declined precipitously with the onset of war. In 1942, only 14,015,000 children attended any kind of school – only 47.6 percent of the total number of students in 1937 (the beginning of the Five Year Plan) and only 40 percent of total students in 1940. After the onset of war, attendance in rural schools declined by approximately 58.4 percent; urban schools suffered a decline of approximately 62.4 percent.⁸⁴

Each memoirist discussed attended school at some point during the war years, though the quality of the education appears to have been varied. Fuel, staff, and resources were always lacking, except in a few select schools. Hautzig recalls all grades meeting in one room, sharing old textbooks and writing on old newspaper due to shortages of resources.⁸⁵ For five rubles a month, she received

⁸³ See, for example, RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 26, l. 172. This report estimates that, on average, evacuated children missed five to six months of school due to travel/transport issues. Also, see Beatrice King, *Soviet Childhood in Wartime* (London: Russia Today Society, 1943), 4. She quotes a July 1943 *Izvestia* article as saying thousands of children were not attending school, either because they preferred to do war work or because they had no parents at home to ensure their attendance.

⁸⁴ Gosplan provides no figures for 1941. This total student population includes students in primary schools and secondary schools (both incomplete and complete). Total number of students in schools for 1937: 29,446,000. Total number of students in schools for 1940: 34,734,600. (Urban: 4,034,600; rural: 9,978,400) On a related note, student populations in children's homes declined only slightly (about 11 percent) from 1940; the number of students in kindergartens actually increased slightly (about 4 percent), probably because of the massive number of women thrust into the workforce during the war. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Ekonomiki f. 4372, op. 93, d. 821, l. 219, in A. Ia. Livshin and I. B. Orlov, *Sovetskaia povsednevnost' i massovoe soznanie 1939-1945* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2003), 272. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Ekonomiki hereafter cited as RGAE.

⁸⁵ Hautzig, *The Endless Steppe*, 98. She notes that the school for the nearby factory director's and special workers' children was much nicer than the village school she attended. It was heated, had larger classrooms, and the teacher were evacuated professors from Leningrad and Moscow. Hautzig, 199.

lunch at school: a slice of bread with an occasional piece of cheese. In Lenger, Kazakhstan, Goldberger attended a “modern” school for three years during the war. She, too, remembers making exercise books out of newspaper, but adds that only children with enough money for shoes and books could attend.⁸⁶

Interestingly, no Kazakhs attended her school, though a wide variety of ethnic groups – mostly evacuees and deportees, it seems – were represented. Mordvins, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, and Chechens (after 1942) shared classes, and Goldberger reports that “every ethnic group thoroughly disliked all others.”⁸⁷ Hautzig, on the other hand, describes the Siberians in her new school as very warm and embracing; unlike Goldberger, she experienced no anti-semitic or nationalist-inspired taunting.

The war dominated the curriculum: topics often reflected wartime concerns, geography could be taught using the war as a guide, and so on. Military training was added to the curriculum. In Goldberger’s school, students learned to march, put on gas masks, take a rifle “to pieces” and repair it, run five kilometers wearing gas masks and carrying rifles, and throw two types of grenades. Students also took turns standing guard at the school from the end of the school day until the following morning.⁸⁸ Military training was considered so important that in

⁸⁶ Goldberger, *Stalin’s Little Guest*, 103-105.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 94. Goldberger says she was teased for being Polish and Jewish; the latter she learned to mask in order to avoid trouble. Her friend, Anna, was beaten unconscious on the way home from school for “flaunting her Jewishness.”

⁸⁸ Goldberger, *Stalin’s Little Guest*, 141-142, 166.

1943, the state decreed an end to coeducation in secondary schools in order “to produce the best citizen who will create the finest family.”⁸⁹ In boys’ schools, additional military training was added to the existing curriculum; in girls’ schools, housecraft and childcare training was added. Despite the law, most children who lived outside of major cities probably attended co-ed schools during the war, due to the shortage of teachers and resources. A generous estimate suggests a 40 percent decrease in the number of teachers between 1941 and 1943.⁹⁰

In addition, students and teachers engaged in *kolkhoz* (collective farm) agricultural work, on “volunteer” days (*subbotniki* or *voskresenki*), summer vacation, and during the school year.⁹¹ The tremendous loss of manpower caused by the draft necessitated that children help to fill their places. A 1942 decree had added a weekly two hours of agricultural training “to provide . . . skills essential for intelligent and satisfactory work on a farm” to the secondary school curriculum.⁹² That training was to be put to use. A 1943 letter from a student in Irkustskaia oblast’ to the front reads, “We are on summer vacation now but this year it’s a different vacation because of the war. All of our teachers and students

⁸⁹ King, *Russia Goes to School*, 14-17. In 1946, military training was abolished for girls and reduced to two hours weekly for sixteen and seventeen-year-old boys.

⁹⁰ King, *Russia Goes to School*, 164-165. In 1941, there were 1,222,805 teachers in the Soviet Union; in 1943, there were 774,795. King tends to be rather generous with the Soviet Union; probably the shortage was graver than she reports.

⁹¹ Goldberger remarks that “we children were ordered to volunteer for work in the Kolkhoz ‘Stalin’s Morning’ . . .” Goldberger, *Stalin’s Little Guest*, 72. See also, Hautzig, *The Endless Steppe*, 140; Winterton, *Eye-witness*, 11-12; Tobien, *Dancing*, 104.

⁹² King, 64.

work in the kolkhoz to help the front.”⁹³ In one of Maya Ganina’s short stories about the war, evacuated children from Moscow work on the collective farm, getting up at 5:00 a.m., weeding and digging holes.⁹⁴ Komsomol Central Committee member Martiianova reported that children were working ten to eleven hour days on a local kolkhoz.⁹⁵

A wide variety of other war-driven tasks competed with school for the attention of children. Official workdays (*trudodnei*), which were supposed to be logged and compensated, excluded other commendable activities such as collecting medicinal plants or scrap metal, foraging for wild food sources (i.e., mushrooms or berries), or working in factories, all of which contributed to the homefront effort and were sanctioned by the state.⁹⁶

Not all children devoted themselves to betterment of society. In a September 1942 report, Mikhailov enumerated a variety of troubling trends around the Soviet Union. Teenage thugs roamed the streets in Chkalov and armed gangs of children in Prokopievsk (Novosibirskaia oblast’). In Moscow, authorities had to “constantly catch children running away from schools.” In Cheliabinsk, young workers committed 42 percent of work discipline violations.

⁹³ TsKhDMO f. 7, op. 1, d. 715, l. 5-5ob., in Astrakhantseva, Ch.1, 52-53.

⁹⁴ See, for example, “Why Did They Chop the Chesnut Trees Down?” in Ganina, *The Road to Nirvana*, trans. Olga Shartse (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), 161.

⁹⁵ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 18. She notes that this sort of work is quite appropriate for children over twelve years old (7th grade), but not really suitable for eight year olds (3rd grade). This indicates that children as young as eight were participating in agricultural work.

⁹⁶ The subject of children’s war work is addressed in greater breadth and depth in Chapter Six.

He explained, “We are talking about fourteen- to fifteen-year olds many of which . . . do not do any work. Why? . . . the saw is too dull, then he is two hours late for lunch and that undermines his health, so he really cannot perform”⁹⁷

Goldberger remembers from her years in Kazakhstan that theft was simply a means to an end: survival. From marketplace thieves with razors strapped to their palms to workplace thieves furtively slipping an extra can of milk in their coats, she recounts, “Everybody who had the opportunity stole. A good job was the one which offered most opportunity to do so. It was the only way to survive . . . it was perfectly respectable. . . . After all, the government owned everything on our behalf, . . . [but] it was a terrible thing to get caught.”⁹⁸

State policies toward children engaging in such illegal – and during the war, treasonous – activities were dealt with in an increasingly adultlike manner. At fourteen, a child could be tried as an adult for any offense, including political crimes; a twelve- to fourteen-year-old could be tried as an adult for theft, murder, sabotage, and violent acts. The state already had penal camps for children and youth prior to 1941, but the extraordinary conditions created by the war apparently increased both the amount of petty crime as well as the number of *bezprizorniki* across the Soviet Union. The state addressed the problems of child

⁹⁷ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 20.

⁹⁸ Goldberger, *Stalin's Little Guest*, 110, 120.

neglect, hooliganism, and crime in a predictable, if unimaginative, way.⁹⁹ In June 1943, Stalin authorized the NKVD to set up labor colonies for the estimated 50,000 eleven-to-sixteen-year-olds who fell into one of three categories: neglected (or homeless) children and youth, those arrested for hooliganism and petty crime, and children at state orphanages who misbehaved.¹⁰⁰ A subsequent directive, in July 1944, ordered the NKVD to increase the number of children in labor colonies by ten thousand.¹⁰¹ Lavrentii Beria's instructions, issued six days after Stalin's initial order, make it clear that, in most respects, children's labor colonies differed little from "regular" NKVD camps. He authorized "all measures" to prevent children from escaping the camps or transport to the camps and required that processing procedures not exceed two weeks. "Work ethics" and "curriculum" were to be conducted "in accordance with the norms of the NKVD's work colonies."¹⁰² State-provided provisions were, predictably, meager. A list for the labor colonies claim that inmates received a median portion of 2500 calories daily, but Beria's instructions clearly state that exceptional workers were

⁹⁹ The situation is quite reminiscent of the 1920s. With the number of *bezprizorniki* spiraling out of control due to the combined effects of World War I, civil war, and famine, the state resorted to arresting and confining children to labor camps in an effort to combat roving bands of homeless, orphaned children. See Alan Ball, *And Now My Soul Is Hardened: Abandoned Children in Soviet Russia, 1918-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

¹⁰⁰ "On Increasing the Measures to Fight Against Crime by Children, Against Children's Neglect, and Against Child Hooligans," June 15, 1943, GARF f. 5446, op. 1, d. 215, l. 214-216, in Semen Samuilovich Vilenskii, *Deti GULAGa: 1918-1956* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia", 2002), 383.

¹⁰¹ *Sbornik postanovlenii SNK SSSR za 1944 god*, 35-37, in Vilenskii, *Deti GULAGa*, 408-409.

¹⁰² GARF f. 9401, op. 12, d. 210 T. 1, ll. 2-3ob., in Vilenskii, *Deti GULAGa*, 386-387.

to be rewarded with food. The median of 2500 calories, then, must take into account the half who received more, and the half who received far less.¹⁰³ Tasks performed in labor colonies included ammunition production, agricultural work, and military clothing production. “Exceptional” workers were to be identified and placed in special camps where skills such as metalwork, woodwork, and wool production were taught; these special colony sites ranged from central Russia (Moskovskaia oblast’ and Yaroslavskaia oblast’) to the Caucasus (Georgia, Azerbaijan) to southcentral Russia (Bashkir ASSR) to Central Asia (Uzbekistan), though children’s labor colonies were located throughout the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁴ In an August 1944 report, the NKVD reported that children’s labor colonies had produced 52 million rubles worth of goods in the first half of 1944, overfulfilling most norms while simultaneously being directed to “reduce assignations from the

¹⁰³ Head of GULAG for the NKVD, Usievich, “Supplement #1” to “NKVD Order #686 ‘On the Organization of Special Labor/Educational Colonies under the NKVD of the USSR,’” November 17, 1943, GARF f. 9401, in Vilenskii, *Deti GULAGa*, 397. (No further archival information is provided.) The supplement is a list which breaks down food portions and caloric value. For example, the 2500 calorie count included such items as 400 g (14 oz) of rye bread (760 cal.), 50 g (1.7 oz) meat/meat products (54 cal.), 70 g (2.4 oz) fish/fish products (48.3 cal.), 700 g (1.5 lb) potatoes/vegetables (319.2 cal.), 16.6 g (.5 oz) sugar (64.4 cal.). One wonders whether these children ate better or worse than the average child in the Soviet Union. If such rations were available – the NKVD certainly had the ability to allocate them – they are better rations than those described in memoirs of evacuees or Leningraders. If, though, one were to consider the kinds of rations usually described in gulag memoirs, or what “bread” rations consisted of in cities like Gorkii or Moscow, then this list was more or less meaningless.

¹⁰⁴ There are seven special camps for boys listed, and one camp for girls. This suggests that either the camp population was predominately male or that the NKVD valued “male” skills such as metal work more than “female” skills such as wool production – or both. *Ibid.*, 396. There were obviously more than eight colonies for children, as evidenced by the list of high-performing and low-performing camps. Thirty-one camps are listed in a report from August 1944. They span the “usual boundaries” of the gulag – from Arkangelsk’ to eastern Siberia. GARF f. 9401, op. 12, d. 210, l. 6-6a, in Vilenskii, *Deti GULAGa*, 412.

government to support their needs,” a euphemism which resulted in depriving the young workers of adequate food and shelter.¹⁰⁵ By decree, children could not be released before age fourteen (except by parental request, in the case of abandoned children). Youth were to be released from penal colonies at age sixteen with trade certification and job placement, unless sentence extensions were imposed by NKVD leadership.

The only account of an NKVD children’s penal colony, written by a Polish deportee, suggests that extensions were quite usual. Twenty-six Polish girls were placed in a juvenile penal colony in 1941. The camp housed five hundred inmates, from thirteen to eighteen years old. Most of the Soviet inmates appeared to the Poles to be hard-drinking, swearing “prostitutes, murderesses, thieves, and female hooligans” wracked with syphilis, “covered with tattoos like a Chinese screen,” yet “loyally disposed toward the Soviet Union.”¹⁰⁶ The girls worked in a sewing factory and knitting mill – probably engaged in the wool and military clothing production noted above – in two shifts of ten hours each. Cotton dust blanketed the workers, clogging their noses and enflaming their lungs. Many girls showed signs of lead poisoning, perhaps from pipes, paint, or machinery at

¹⁰⁵ GARF f. 9401, op. 12, d. 210, ll. 6-6a, in Vilenskii, *Deti GULAGa*, 411-413. Norms fulfilled: 105% ammunition, 102 % grain sorted, 106.5% wool, 115% military clothing, 98% Pumps “Garda”, 98.5% shoes. Twenty-four colonies are commended for excellent output; seven are singled out for censure. Several NVKD divisional heads were given bonuses of an extra month’s wages for their efforts.

¹⁰⁶ Marysia, trans. Irene Wasilewska, *For Uncommitted Crimes* (Rome: 1945), 28, in Krolkowski, *Stolen Childhood*, 14-15.

the factory/mill. Punishment for misbehavior included time in solitary, called the “carcer,” a narrow cell filled with water. Political prisoners, usually children of political offenders, were treated more cruelly than other inmates. The memoirist remembers that the hair of one “political” turned completely gray within weeks of her arrival at the colony.¹⁰⁷

In a 1944 booklet published by London’s Russia Today Society, Georgii Miterev, People’s Commissar for Health, claimed, “Despite all our war-time difficulties, the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet Government have not for a moment forgotten the children.”¹⁰⁸ The state had not forgotten the children; however, state policies towards children were not particularly benign or paternal. On the one hand, the state launched a huge campaign to encourage the adoption of war orphans;¹⁰⁹ on the other, orphans in children’s homes were given little food and few resources, and directors of children’s homes were granted enormous latitude in seizing, disposing of, and making revenue from children’s personal possessions.¹¹⁰ Fourteen-year-old boys could enroll in newly-created five-year trade schools for mining, construction, engineering, or transportation which

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 13, 15.

¹⁰⁸ Eleanor Fox, *Red Army Men and Their Dependents* (London: Russia Today Society, 1944), 7. This is the same Miterev who refused to collaborate with British and American medical researchers who attempted to share information about typhus treatments, antimalarial medications, nutrition, and surgical techniques during the war. At least one scholar suggests that the Soviet Union would not have suffered such enormous losses had these efforts been more well-received by the state. E. H. Beardsley, “No Help Wanted: Medical Research Exchange Between Russia and the West During the Second World War,” *Medical History*, 22, 1978, 365-377.

¹⁰⁹ See Green, “Everyday Life,” for more information.

¹¹⁰ GARF f. 7523, op. 108, d. 332, l. 215-217, in Vilenskii, *Deti GULAGa*, 413-414.

offered the benefit of deferred draft, yet trade school students were among those who received the lowest of rations – so low that Leningraders remember the starving boys, as a group, as the most desperate and most likely to steal one’s rations.¹¹¹ While Soviet propaganda prided itself on “regard[ing] children’s leisure with great seriousness,”¹¹² there was effectively no children’s entertainment by July 1943. The Committee for the Arts of the USSR ordered the reopening of children’s theatres and showing of plays for children in May 1944.¹¹³ When children’s theatres, circuses, and cinemas were reopened, performances could only be held in the daytime. Upon first glance, this seems designed to protect and honor children, but successive documents make clear that the state was combating juvenile ticket-scalping. The sale of evening tickets to children under sixteen was prohibited, and performances for children had to occur in the daytime, due to the “recent rise in instances of theatre tickets being resold by schoolchildren,” presumably on the black market.¹¹⁴

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¹¹¹ See Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 55-56; Salisbury, *The 900 Days*, 332; Beatrice King, *Soviet Childhood in Wartime* (London: Russia Today Society, 1943), 73, describes the 1940 decree that created spots for one million boys in trade schools.

¹¹² King, *Soviet Childhood*, 139.

¹¹³ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 68, l. 6. The directive from Deputy Chairman of the Committee for the Arts of the USSR SNK, Solodovnikov, makes it clear that all children’s theatres had either closed or were being used to stage adult entertainment by July 1943.

¹¹⁴ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 68, l. 1, 5.

During the liberation of the Ukraine in the late summer offensive of 1943, Vasily Grossman attached himself to the 75th Guards Rifle Division and kept notes of his observations. He wrote:

On a windy and overcast morning, we met a boy on the edge of the village of Tarasevichi, by the Dnepr. He looked about thirteen to fourteen years old. The boy was extremely thin, his sallow skin was tight on his cheekbones, large bumps protruded on his skull. His lips were dirty, pale, like a dead man's who had fallen face flat on the ground. His eyes were looking in a tired way, there was neither joy nor sadness in them. They are so frightening, these old, tired, lifeless eyes of children.

“Where is your father?”

“Killed,” he answered.

“And mother?”

“She died.”

“Have you got brothers or sisters?”

“A sister. They took her to Germany.”

“Have you got any relatives?”

“No, they were all burned in a partisan village.”

And he walked into a potato field, his feet bare and black from the mud,
straightening the rags of his torn shirt.¹¹⁵

What was unique about the experience of children in the Great Patriotic War? Fear, anxiety, deprivation, death, loss – these experiences and emotions were shared by children, youth, and adults. Yet children lived these emotions and these trials differently than other groups due to age and position in society.

A young age put children at great risk for physical harm. Low rations and scarcity created conditions conducive to malnutrition and starvation, and indeed, a recollection shared by all memoirists is an acute awareness of a lack of food. After all his experiences in occupied Ukraine, Dovbenko claims that “what has stuck most strongly in my mind for all my life is that I was perishing with hunger.”¹¹⁶ Kirshin agrees: “During the entire period of occupation, I cannot remember a single day that I did not feel hunger.”¹¹⁷ In Siberia, deportee Hautzig recalls being “perpetually hungry.”¹¹⁸ Unlike adults, however, the starving child suffers developmental problems. Decades of studies demonstrate that the harsh wartime conditions are “reflected in a reduction in general (overall) body size and weight, in chest measurements and in retarded sexual development.”¹¹⁹ This

¹¹⁵ RGALI f. 619, op. 1, d. 953, Grossman in Beevor, *A Writer at War*, 249.

¹¹⁶ Dovbenko, in Anderson, *No Longer Silent*, 47.

¹¹⁷ Kirshin, in Anderson, *No Longer Silent*, 279.

¹¹⁸ Hautzig, *The Endless Steppe*, 33.

¹¹⁹ Igor Kozlov and Alla Samsonova, “The Impact of the Siege on the Physical Development of Children,” in John Barber and Andrei Dzeniskevich, *Life and Death in Besieged*

delayed development was particularly acute for those children who lived through the siege at Leningrad. Kozhina stopped growing during her years as a Leningrader and evacuee, though she was only ten years old. Teenage Shavrova's weight fell from 92.4 pounds to 68.2 pounds by 1942.¹²⁰ Skrjabina watched as her son and his friends promptly fell ill and despondent from lack of food, appearing to regress in development.¹²¹ Scarcity caused many to dream of food, to obsess over tiny amounts of wasted bread or grains of sugar. The preoccupation with food even filtered into children's innocent questions. In 1943, writer Vera Inber recorded some overheard conversations. "Boy: Mother, what is ham? Mother tells him. Boy: And who has tried it?" And, "Girl: Mother, what does a giant weigh? And what rations is he getting?"¹²² Despite the contention that children of Leningrad turned out to be "normal" adults due to their superior training as Pioneers,¹²³ long-term studies suggest that siege survivors lost approximately two years of life expectancy and were more likely to be susceptible to a variety of diseases.¹²⁴

Leningrad, 1941-44 (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 175. Kozlov and Samsonova, it should be noted, conclude that delayed sexual development among boys in trade schools appears to have occurred, but not necessarily among mixed-population schoolchildren. Also, they discuss at least eight previous studies of children's physical development between the 1940s and the present.

¹²⁰ Shavrova letter May 26, 1942, in Simmons, *Writing the Siege*, 39.

¹²¹ Skrjabina, *Siege and Survival*, 37-38. She concluded that grown women were the most durable Soviet citizens.

¹²² Inber, *Leningrad Diary*, 167.

¹²³ Skomorovsky and Morris, *Leningrad*, 42.

¹²⁴ Lidiya Khoroshinina, "Long-Term Effects of Lengthy Starvation in Childhood among Survivors of the Siege," in Barber and Dzenishevich, *Life and Death*, 208. Survivors tended to be

Remarkably, however, older children also seemed to have been the most resilient of sufferers. While the resiliency itself does not surprise (“kids just bounce back”), the degree does. In the wartime demographic catastrophe, population reconstructions demonstrate that each age cohort in every part of the Soviet Union experienced population loss. A decrease in fertility and rise in child/infant mortality levels during the war halved the number of children under age five. But the two cohorts of children born between 1927 and 1936 suffered the lowest degrees of loss during the war; in fact, of children born between 1932 and 1936, an astonishing 96 percent were still alive by 1946. Of those born between 1927 and 1931, 94 percent were alive in 1946; the largest losses in this group (1.064 million males) are probably largely attributable to the attainment of draft age (sixteen) by a majority of this cohort during the war.¹²⁵ The loss of hundreds of thousands of children remains staggering and tragic, but the amazingly high rate of survival is suggestive and deserves more exploration in the future.

more susceptible to cardiovascular disease, cancerous intoxication, and pneumonia, compared to a control group.

¹²⁵ Andreev, Darsky, and Kharkova, in Lutz, Scherbov, and Volkov, *Demographic Trends*, 430-436. See especially, Tables 23.2, 23.3, and 23.4, for population estimates by cohort in 1941, 1946, and human losses by age and sex, respectively. Percentages were calculated by dividing 1946 population estimate by the 1941 population estimate for each cohort (age 5-9 and age 10-14). Raw numbers as follows: for 1941 – 18,463,000 five- to nine-year-olds; 22,325,000 ten- to fourteen-year-olds; for 1946 – 17,661,000 ten- to fourteen-year-olds; 20,908,000 fifteen- to nineteen-year-olds; losses by 1946 – males, age 10-14, 194,000 of 8,760,000; females, age 10-14, 107,000 of 8,900,000; males, age 15-19, 1,064,000 of 10,028,000; females, age 15-19, 340,000 of 10,880,000. For comparison of rough survival rate by age cohort, the next highest is 83 percent. Adult survival rates fall in the 74-78 percent range.

There are several factors which probably contributed to this astonishing survival rate among older children. One must be parental care and sacrifice. All memoirists recall their mothers (occasionally fathers, though men were primarily absent due to combat) finding creative ways to keep their children fed, or doing without food themselves in order to give what little they had to their children. Magayeva's family and neighbors, living in a building with no bomb shelter, stayed in an apartment playing games during air raids. No matter how bad the bombing got, the adults encouraged play to continue "in order to protect [her] and other children from fear."¹²⁶

A second factor is age. In order to survive the war, it helped to be an "older" child rather than a "younger" child. According to Kozlov and Samsonova, the "age most vulnerable to adverse conditions" appears to be three-to-four.¹²⁷ Though all children who lived through siege conditions experienced physical difficulties and developmental retardation, the greatest effects were felt by children who were under the age of eight by war's end (born 1938-1945). Greater developmental difficulties generally relate to a weakened immune system and greater negative response to stress factors. It follows, then, that children under eight would have a higher mortality rate than children over eight. Kozlov's and Samsonova's study specifically referred to siege conditions in Leningrad, but the experiences of starvation, combat, anxiety/fear, separation, and so on, were

¹²⁶ Magayeva, *Surviving*, 39.

¹²⁷ Kozlov and Samsonova, in Barber and Dzeniskevich, *Life and Death*, 186.

common throughout the most populated areas of the Soviet Union; therefore, their assertions about the increased chance of survival for older children may be cautiously extended beyond the city limits.

Perhaps childish imagination played a role in survival. Though most were unable to literally hurt the enemy, many children seemed to nurse the dream that one day, they might. In the summer of 1941, Leningrader Kochina observed that “spymania, like an infectious disease” swept through the ranks of her friends.¹²⁸ Twelve-year-old Liubov’ Borisovna Beregovaia mused, “I often thought about what I would do to Hitler if he had been caught. Gouge out his eyes, like they do to bandits and cyclopes in fairy tales? Brand him with the Fascist sign, like the Germans did to our partisans with a star?”¹²⁹ When the prompt “What I would do if I had an invisible cap” was given to a class of sixth graders, thirty “almost identical answers” returned in essay form: reconnaissance in the German rear, sabotaging of German weapons, and fighting in the Red Army.¹³⁰ Ganina’s characters, young boys in wartime Moscow, fantasize about killing Germans. Mishka makes a stiletto and uses an anatomy book to figure out where to stab a German should he encounter one. He claims he will scalp them in order to keep

¹²⁸ Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 33-34.

¹²⁹ Beregovaia, *Schastlivoe, nepovtorimoe . . .* (Sankt-Peterburg: Papirus, 1997), 23.

¹³⁰ Skomorovsky and Morris, *Leningrad*, 56-57.

count of how many he's killed. Keshka, his friend, agrees that "it would be sheer delight to watch them dying in horrible convulsions . . ." ¹³¹

Accordingly, play and leisure time were dramatically influenced by the war. In most memoirs, free time is devoted to day-to-day activities such as foraging, resting, housework, or schoolwork. Children, though, express themselves through play, and it is nonsensical to assume that it was absent, even in a time of war. For many, the war provided unprecedented freedom from supervision – fathers were at the front, mothers worked and slept at the factories six days a week, the elderly charged with keeping an eye on children were, for the most part, incapable. Kirshin remembers that "every day we played war, and passionately argued who would play the part of the Soviet troops, and who – the Germans." ¹³² He also recounts that boys were blown up while playing with discarded grenades, cartridges, and shells lying in the streets of his village. ¹³³ Others made games of collecting shrapnel, making up rules to protect one another from burning fingers on red-hot metal, ran pretend air raids on Berlin, and played military hospital. ¹³⁴

What is most striking is the normalization of war and war-related activities in the lives of children. A *Soviet War News* article quotes a child from an evacuee

¹³¹ Ganina, *The Road to Nirvana*, 169-170.

¹³² Kirshin, in Anderson, *No Longer Silent*, 278. See also, Magayeva, *Surviving*, 41-42.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Magayeva, *Surviving*, 42, 48.

camp in 1942: “We practice grenade throwing and play with our pets.”¹³⁵ A friend of Vera Inber received a letter from her evacuated daughter which read, “I am mastering the rifle and reading Gogol’s *Dead Souls*.”¹³⁶ The equation of weapons training with typical hobbies in each quote is quite telling; playing war had become standard, as had mortality. “Death has become routine, a part of everyday life,” wrote one deportee.¹³⁷

Death visited many Soviet children in an intimate way. The Great Fatherland War produced an epidemic of fatherlessness in the Soviet Union. Over 76 percent of human losses were men, more than half of them between the ages of fifteen and forty-four.¹³⁸ Hautzig, in Siberia, recalls, “Almost without exception, the children of [my] village had lost either a father, an uncle, a brother, a cousin; sometimes, there were none left, no male relatives at all.”¹³⁹ Mothers, too, became casualties to war, separated from children by evacuation, away at work, or preoccupied by survival. Of the 994 children who lived through the Battle of Stalingrad, only nine could be reunited with their parents.¹⁴⁰ Even children who remained with their families sometimes “lost” them to the war. Teenage Lida, in occupied territory, wrote to her brother, Vanya, “Father’s hair

¹³⁵ *Soviet War News*, August 27, 1942, in Anglo-Soviet Youth Friendship Alliance, *Soviet Youth Organisations: Pioneers, Komsomols; Sport and Culture* (London: The Alliance, 1943), 6.

¹³⁶ Inber, *Leningrad Diary*, 167.

¹³⁷ Roy-Wojciechowski, *A Strange Outcome*, 12.

¹³⁸ Andreev, Darsky, and Kharkova, in Lutz, Scherbov, and Volkov, *Demographic Trends*, 430-436.

¹³⁹ Hautzig, *The Endless Steppe*, 223.

¹⁴⁰ Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 407. Number of civilians who lived through the Battle of Stalingrad from RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 8, d. 226.

turned grey from worrying; and mother has changed, too. She looks as if she were seventy years old.”¹⁴¹ Imagine the horror of a granddaughter whose grandmother prepared to eat her.¹⁴² Some children tried to replace their lost families with new ones. There may have been as many as 25,000 “sons of the regiment” (*syn pol’pad*), children six to sixteen who were adopted by various soldiers or army units, many accompanying them into battle or acquiring military duties along the way.¹⁴³ While this filled a need, both for a parentless child and for childless parents, this was a precarious situation that could be no more permanent or dependable than the next gun battle. Still, surviving “sons” testify to warm, paternal relations between soldiers and children. But even authority figures could disappoint in wartime. Yuri Kirshin and his family were turned in to the Germans as Party members – by Yuri’s Pioneer leader!¹⁴⁴ The “orphaning” of Soviet children, literally or figuratively, was a unique part of their wartime experience.

The war orphan – probably the most popular image of the child in the press for adults – symbolized powerlessness. In society, children, like women,

¹⁴¹ TsKhDMO f. 7, op. 1, d. 2761, l. 1, in Astrakhantseva, *Po obe storona*, ch. 1, 51-52.

¹⁴² Interview “Elena Taranukhina,” *Leningrad*, at <http://www.bestofrussia.ca/war.htm>, accessed June 20, 2004. In it, Taranukhina recounts that as she arrived home one day in early 1942, she found her mother preparing to eat her daughter.

¹⁴³ Catherine Merridale, *Ivan’s War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 248-249. Merridale interviewed a veteran who served, as a thirteen-year-old, with a regiment after his mother was taken by the Germans and his home burned.

¹⁴⁴ Kirshin, in Anderson, *No Longer Silent*, 277. In fact, the leader, Kibaltshic, arrested them himself and took them to the camp for families with Party connections.

are often regarded as weak or immature in some sense; thus, the issue of age is reflective of the issue of gender. Certainly, the state portrayed children as vulnerable and helpless, as a perusal of wartime propaganda posters demonstrates.¹⁴⁵ Occupation, siege, frontline fighting, evacuation, the children's home, displacement – all could contribute to feelings of helplessness. Without a parent, the situation became more perilous and uncertain. Abandoned or orphaned children had few ways to feed or take care of themselves, many of them illegal. Most children could not fight in the war, could not choose whether or not to be evacuated, could not avenge the loss of home or family. Twelve-year-old Tolya Zakharov wrote, "I am sorry about one thing only. The Nazis will be beaten before I get a chance to grow up. I'll have no chance at all to put my hands on them. I did put out some incendiary bombs but that doesn't count. I didn't have a chance to hit them and probably never will. I won't be grown up enough."¹⁴⁶

And yet, the war did pressure children to grow up quickly. There was adult work to be done, adult responsibilities to be shouldered, younger siblings to be kept alive. Vera Inber gave a speech in Moscow about the inhabitants of Leningrad; in it, she described a little boy "who wept as he put out an incendiary

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, P.A. Snopkov, A. E. Snopkov, and A. F. Shkliaruk, *Plakaty voyny i pobedy, 1941-1945* (Moskva: Kontakt-Kul'tura, 2005) or G. L. Demosfenova, *Sovetskie plakativ-frontu* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1985). In Snopkov's magnificent collection of two hundred nine wartime posters, seventeen include children as figures. Of these, fourteen depict children as past or future victims of Nazi aggression and torture.

¹⁴⁶ Skomorovsky and Morris, *Leningrad*, 56.

bomb with sand. He was afraid of it, he was only nine years old; nevertheless, as he wept, he was extinguishing it.”¹⁴⁷ With many mothers and fathers absent, responsibility to care for younger siblings or grandparents often fell upon older children. Children helped to bury their family members whose bodies were sometimes mutilated and hideously disfigured by injury or disease.¹⁴⁸ The boundaries between childhood and adulthood were blurred by extraordinary circumstances. Social upheaval affected family roles, definitions, and values. Few families had the luxury of preserving “normal” childhood; the war simply did not allow it. Attempts to treat children as children led to contradictions in daily life. Kirshin had witnessed the deaths of family and neighbors at the hands of the Germans, yet, because of his age, was kept from attending funerals.¹⁴⁹ By 1943, children were being sent to Pioneer camp in Leningrad – a city still under siege. While camp was supposed to be a time for play, rest, and relaxation, the children met all visitors with the same questions: was there any shelling? in which districts? what was the forecast for future attacks? Some children could not bear to be away at camp, feeling the responsibility to check on relatives back in the city.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Inber, *Leningrad Diary*, 99.

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, Prof. Nikolai Viktorovich Goncharov, interview, 23 November 1995, in Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 105. Eleven-year-old Goncharov helped his mother bury his grandfather, noting, “Before filling in the grave, we searched for his head, but could not find it.”

¹⁴⁹ Kirshin, in Anderson, *No Longer Silent*, 278.

¹⁵⁰ Inber, *Leningrad Diary*, 151; Magayeva, *Surviving*, 48.

For some, the burdens of loss, deprivation, sorrow, and survival were too much to bear; hence the “old, tired, lifeless eyes” Grossman witnessed. An aid worker in Stalingrad described children “swollen with hunger [who] cringed in corners, afraid to speak, to even look people in the face.”¹⁵¹ Others, however, recognized the necessity of change. Kozhina, subject to deep depression during the war, realized, “I was now regarded as an adult, expected to do something more than study my homework well or keep my hands clean. I had to summon some force within, which would help me defeat my plague.”¹⁵² Perhaps as Fadeev noted, “these were neither children nor were they grown-ups – they were simply new people . . .”¹⁵³ – new people with one foot planted firmly in the familiar world of childhood and another thrust into the unpredictable, hazardous world of adulthood. Inna Bityugova, a ninth grader in Leningrad, submitted an essay to a writing contest in 1943. She wrote about her work on a collective farm: “I know now what hard work means, and I feel responsible for the work I do. I feel I’m not a child schoolgirl any more, but a schoolgirl warrior. I have worked for the city and for the Front.”¹⁵⁴ On the cover of the warrior’s essay dance hand-drawn, smiling beets, radishes, and turnips.

¹⁵¹ Margaret Wettlin, *Russian Road: Three Years of War in Russia as Lived Through by An American Woman* (London: Hutchison, 1945), 119.

¹⁵² Kozhina, *Through the Burning Steppe*, 136.

¹⁵³ Fadeev, *Leningrad*, 46.

¹⁵⁴ Inber, *Leningrad Diary*, 149.

CHAPTER 4
THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR AND
CRISIS FOR THE YOUNG PIONEERS

There is no evident Pioneer movement at the present time.

Komsomol Central Committee Council on Children's Education,

September 7, 1942¹

Few experiences of the 1920s or 1930s foreshadowed the widespread devastation and utter disruption the Great Patriotic War would bring about in the Soviet Union beginning in June 1941. No institution was immune to the effects of war, yet this national emergency had serious consequences for the Young Pioneers. After two decades of incredible growth and important collective definition, the Pioneers, like the nation itself, were thrown headlong into a heretofore unknown fight for existence. The organization did not respond well to the calamitous conditions created by Germany's invasion. In fact, in the estimation of the Komsomol leaders responsible for the Young Pioneers, the Pioneer organization had almost disappeared by the fall of 1942, crushed beneath the weight of wartime demands, seemingly irrelevant to the children it was supposed to be leading, and erased from the public milieu.

¹ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 11.

* * *

In some sense, the decline of the Young Pioneers was a foreseeable consequence of war. Memoirs of those who were children during the struggle against Nazi Germany illustrate the all-encompassing nature of war. Daily life for many was consumed by the tasks necessary to survival, both small and large. The chaos of evacuation and resettlement dislocated individuals, families, and communities. Occupation brought new and unpredictable change to the quotidian. Even areas far removed from the frontlines experienced upset to routine. Commitments to military service or labor broke up families. Shortages, common in the prewar era, were exacerbated by the onset of hostilities with the Axis Powers and the implementation of a war-driven economy. In conditions such as these, any collective body reliant on schedule, routine, and ritual the way the Young Pioneers were was bound to suffer.

In addition, the most important site of Young Pioneer activity and contact with children, the school, had been dramatically affected by the war. Primary and secondary schools, the headquarters of local Pioneer links, troops, and detachment, were closed or erratically attended and suffered from a shortage of teachers and Pioneer staff. Members of the Komsomol manned and led local Pioneer detachments; any of them would have been of age to volunteer for active duty in the military or to join the workforce diminished by the draft. Student

attendance dropped dramatically during the war. According to statistics from the 1937 Five-Year Plan, the number of students in kindergarten, primary, and primary/secondary schools had increased steadily in the years leading up to 1941. This figure dropped sharply in 1942, the total number of students in school plummeting to 47.6 percent of the 1937 total. The number of students of Pioneer age had decreased by about half, both in cities and in the country.² This was critical. Having located the Young Pioneers in the schools in the 1930s in order to take advantage of the school's rising ubiquity, popularity, and authority, the organization was forced to share the fate of the educational system as it faltered during the Great Patriotic War.

Its primary site of influence compromised, the organization struggled to remain relevant to children in the early years of the war. No directives were issued or conferences held concerning the effects and meaning of the conflict for

² RGAE f. 4372, op. 93, d. 821, l. 219, in Livshin, *Sovetskaia povsednevnost'*, 272. According to Gosplan figures, the third Five-Year Plan aimed at attendance of 40,072,300. Total children in schools (of any sort): 1937 – 29,446,000; 1938 – 31,386,300; 1939 – 32,057,800; 1940 – 34,734,600; 1942 – 14,015,000. No figures are provided for 1941. Thus, the 1942 total of approximately fourteen million is about 47.6 percent of the starting figure of approximately twenty-nine million in 1937, and it is far short of the Five-Year Plan's directive. Students of Pioneer age must be approximated, as the gradations used in the report do not correspond directly with age requirements for the Young Pioneers. Besides reporting figures for kindergartens and orphanages, the report breaks down attendance for 1st-4th grades, 5th-7th grades, and 8th-10th grades. All 5th-7th graders would be potential Pioneers; they would have been about ten to twelve years old. 8th-10th graders, however, could have been twelve to sixteen years old, which exceeds the usual age guidelines for Young Pioneers. Thus, it is impossible to disaggregate data specifically for Young Pioneer-age children. The number of 5th-7th grade students dropped from 7,677,400 in 1937 to 4,164,600 in 1942; the number of 8th-10th grade students decreased from 1,013,200 in 1937 to 721,000 in 1942. Urban and rural figures are remarkably similar, indicating that disruption to education was a common experience across the Soviet Union. In urban areas, the total number of students in schools (of any sort) in 1942 was 46.9 percent of the 1937 total; in rural areas, the total number in 1942 was only slightly higher, at 47.9 percent of the 1937 total.

the Young Pioneers between June 1941 and August 1942. In other words, despite the upheaval of more than fourteen months at war, the Pioneer message remained unchanged. No measures were taken to restructure the organization or shore up members' faithfulness to it. Few steps were proposed to involve children in mass campaigns. No sense of exigency compelled the Pioneer leadership to rework the themes and slogans of the previous decade. To be sure, the rhetoric of the 1930s suggested war-readiness and combative language, the sort of rhetoric which had long characterized the Young Pioneers, but it lacked the urgency which could only be a product of reality. The failure to act and adapt clearly indicates an indifference on the part of the Pioneer leadership, born of necessity or ignorance, toward the future of the children's organization. It seems as if it never occurred to them that the organization might need to adapt to the times.

Practically speaking, resources for the Pioneer organization – and children, in general – were less important to the war effort than the needs of defense and industry. As was the case with other aspects of the Soviet infrastructure, money was diverted to the more pressing requirements and resources of the war machine. While defense spending rose steadily from 1940 to 1944, social-cultural expenditures – including education and physical culture – dropped significantly in the first few years of the war.³ One sign of this decline

³ RGAE f. 1562, op. 41, d. 239, l. 230, in Livshin and Orlov, *Sovetskaia povsednevnost' i massovoe soznanie*, 241. Education budgets for 1940: 22.5 billion rubles; 1941: 15.5 billion; 1942: 10.4 billion; 1943: 13.2 billion; 1944: 20.7 billion; 1945: 26.4 billion. Budgeted amounts

in state funding: *Pionerskaia Pravda* ceased publication in June 1941, not to resume again until 1943. A round of reorganization within Soviet broadcasting occurred in late June 1941. One month later, the Department of Children's Broadcasting was closed, for "lack of work." The Literary-Musical department was tasked with organizing a group for children's broadcasting.⁴ The daily Pioneer broadcast, "Pioneer Dawn" ("*Pionerskaia Zor'ka*") was discontinued until fall of the same year. Pioneer camps, funded primarily by state-sponsored trade unions, found their budgets were slashed dramatically. The budget for children's camps was 258 million rubles in 1941; by the very next year, 1942, the budget had declined by 84.5 percent to 40 million rubles.⁵ The regional committee of Krasnodar' reported in May 1942 that, in addition to other factors, no camps would be held because no money was available to purchase food for the campers and staff.⁶ The welfare and needs of a children's organization – even a children's *Party* organization – tumbled down the list of priorities in the early months and years of the Great Patriotic War. It should be noted, however, that this funding crunch was worst in 1942; from 1943 until the end of the war, budgeted amounts increased steadily. By 1944, most line items had met or

for defense in 1940: 56.8 billion; 1941: 83 billion; 1942: 108.4 billion; 1943: 125 billion; 1944: 137.8 billion; 1945: 128.2 billion.

⁴ Arkhiv Gosteleradio SSSR op. 1 1/s, d. 143, l. 96, and op. 1 1/c, d. 143, l. 186.

⁵ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 22, l. 4-5. The decline in budgeted expenses for Pioneer camps was even greater if one refers to the 1940 figure of 270 million rubles.

⁶ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 22, l. 32. After complaining of financial difficulties, the report continues, "We must also add the tense situation in the region, and therefore, parents do not allow their children to leave for camps. Plus, the military prefers that children are concentrated in one main area."

exceeded prewar (1940) levels.⁷ These budget issues, while temporary, coincided with other factors in the early years of the war, contributing to the demise of the Pioneer organization.

By the fall of 1942, it seems clear that the Young Pioneers were reaching a critical point in its organizational operations. As local units floundered along, trying to keep up some semblance of normalcy, various documents from regional and local levels began to appear in early 1942, suggesting problems within the organization. Representative of such reports is a letter written by Ivolgina, Secretary for Schools of the Bashkir Komsomol obkom, to Koniaeva, the Komsomol member who led the Pioneer organization, in which she asks that the issue of Pioneer work at schools be “urgently reconsidered.”⁸ Though Ivolgina asserts that Pioneers in Bashkiria are “collective-minded, independent, and well-prepared for life,” she urges Koniaeva to revise the by-laws and minimum knowledge level required of Pioneers in order “to place greater demands on the Pioneer and the organization.”

Of serious concern in Bashkiria was the massive shortage of workers and high turnover rate among local leadership. Though the obkom secretary stoutly maintains that “lack of cadres” was a poor excuse for not improving the performance of the Pioneer organization, the reality of the situation is apparent in

⁷ RGAE f. 1562, op. 41, d. 239, l. 230, in Livshin and Orlov, *Sovetskaia povsednevnost' i massovoe soznanie*, 241.

⁸ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 94-94 ob. The letter is dated March 1942.

an attached statistical report. As of June 1942, the Bashkir republic was assigned 525 Pioneer leaders for 243,000 Pioneers – one Pioneer leader for every 445.7 Pioneers! Even if all 525 leaders existed – which is unlikely – this is far from the ideal ratio of one Pioneer leader for each detachment (*druzhina*), much less a leader for each troop (*otriad*) or link (*zveno*).⁹

The issue raised in Bashkiria was illustrative of a national, institutional predicament. The Komsomol considered proper and competent leadership crucial to the success of the Pioneer organization, and here they were faced with serious shortcomings. The problem was twofold: first, there were not enough Pioneer leaders, and second, the Pioneer leaders they had were woefully inexperienced and/or incompetent.

Shortages of Pioneer leaders were endemic across the Soviet Union during the war, as might be expected. Surely many Komsomoltsy felt that working with children was a far less admirable or useful wartime task than enlisting for military duty or working in a defense industry. An excerpt from a meeting of the Penzenskaia oblast' Party cell places full blame for the failure of the Pioneers on local Komsomol cells, reporting that “regional, city, and provincial Komsomol committees have become negligent in selecting and training Pioneer leader cadres. . .”¹⁰ Most of Moscow's schools were without Pioneer leaders by the end

⁹ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 95. The report gives the number of existing Pioneer troops, both urban and rural, as 8407, with a total membership of 243,000 Pioneers.

¹⁰ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 122.

of 1942, one memo blandly noting that the Moscow Komsomol had “not grasped the full extent of the shortcomings in work with the Pioneers or the meaning of the Komsomol Central Committee’s resolution.”¹¹ A blistering 1943 report from Kuibyshev, the “capital of the rear”, lists a barrage of charges such as “most of the detachments [*druzhini*] . . . exist only on paper”, “only two out of the [Molotovskii] region’s eight schools had senior Pioneer leaders”, “there was not a single discussion of the Pioneer organization’s work at the Komsomol city bureau meetings in all of 1943”, “the provincial committee [*obkom*] does not know how many Pioneer leaders are supposed to exist”, concluding that “it is impossible to say anything about the work of the Pioneer headquarters, only because they do not exist either at the Komsomol provincial committee or the city committee, while those that formally exist at some regional committees, do nothing.”¹²

The leaders the organization did have, however, were, for the most part, raw and unproven. Of Gor’kii’s five hundred twenty-nine Pioneer leaders, nearly 60 percent had less than one year’s experience.¹³ Of the two hundred twenty-six senior Pioneer leaders approved for work in Moscow in 1943, 86 percent had less than one year’s experience.¹⁴ Of one thousand six hundred eighty-three Pioneer

¹¹ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 64.

¹² TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 38-42, 53.

¹³ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 77, l. 11. Of the 529, 312 were reported to have less than one year of experience; another 177 had only 1-3 years experience.

¹⁴ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 77, l. 19. Of 229, 195 had less than one year’s experience; only 2 had five to seven years’ experience, the highest level of work experience listed in the report.

leaders active in Kalininskaia province in 1943, 89 percent had less than two years' experience.¹⁵ Some of this inexperience could be attributed to age. The Kuibyshev report recounts that a school principal appointed an eighth-grade student, Vera Bednaia, to be senior Pioneer leader at School No. 80, and that another eighth-grade student, Klara Oltyreva, had been senior detachment leader in her village of Russkie Lipiagi for over twelve months.¹⁶

Other evidence suggests that education level (or lack of) might be a factor in explaining the incompetence of Pioneer leaders. Of the five-hundred-odd Pioneer leaders mentioned in the Gor'kii report above, only thirty-seven are listed as having completed any kind of higher education.¹⁷ In a statistical report on senior Pioneer leaders from February 1944, the vast majority of the regions in the Soviet Union listed their leaders as having completed only secondary school.¹⁸ Whether or not level of education is to blame, some leaders simply appeared to have insufficient general knowledge for leadership among Pioneers. In an institution so heavily dependent on leaders to prescribe behavior and propagandize, ignorance amongst organizers was unforgivable. Anecdotal evidence provided in the Kuibyshev report is suitably damning:

¹⁵ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 77, l. 13.

¹⁶ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 38. A typical eighth-grade student would be thirteen to fourteen years old. These positions would typically be held by older teenagers, if not young adults.

¹⁷ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 77, l. 11.

¹⁸ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 77, l. 18. Of 368 leaders, 331 completed secondary school, as opposed to far smaller numbers which had begun or completed higher education or institute coursework.

For instance, at the large Kuibyshev School No. 13, one Aleksandra Sheveleva worked as a senior Pioneer leader for an entire year. She was completely unable to organize the children, and was not even capable of giving a coherent speech at a troop or detachment convention. Her pathetic blabber at a solemn convention deprived it of any sort of solemnity. The manner in which Comrade Sheveleva directed her troops is apparent from the fact that the troop considered the “best” did not hold a single link meeting in the course of an entire year. . . . The Komsomol regional committee has recommended Comrade Chernaia and Comrade Durasov as the best Pioneer leaders in the city of Kuibyshev. What are these “best” Pioneer leaders like? In talking with them, it became apparent that, for instance, Comrade Chernaia, despite having led a discussion of Chapaev with her Pioneers, does not know who Chapaev actually was. . . .She cannot name a single one of Lenin’s or Stalin’s works. . . . she was unable to recall who wrote *The Queen of Spades* or who composed the music to the opera based on this work. Comrade Durasov displayed a similar level of erudition.¹⁹

¹⁹ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 41.

In the estimation of the Pioneer leadership, such link and troop leaders were useless, despite the great probability that these youth had little training for these positions, were consumed with the tasks of day-to-day survival, and were preoccupied by the war. Formal reports took no notice of non-Pioneer activities – affection shown, tears dried, games played – informal gestures that these youth might have made toward their young charges. The inability to hold conduct formal meetings meant that the Pioneer message was not being conveyed. Thus, in the perception of the Young Pioneer leaders, the institution lacked adequate personnel, both in quantity and quality, to lead children.

Despite the absence of Pioneer link and troop leaders, however, children contributed to the war effort in a multitude of ways. Childrens' activities did not cease because of a lack of leadership from the Pioneers. The implications of this leadership problem were serious and potentially humiliating for the Pioneer organization.

Response to Crisis

The situation within the Pioneer organization was serious enough to merit a special meeting of the Komsomol's Central Committee Council on Children's Education on September 7, 1942. A stenographic account records the comments of eight members of the Central Committee council, including the Secretary of the

Komsomol, Nikolai Aleksandrovich Mikhailov.²⁰ Overall, the meeting laments the woes of the Pioneer organization. There is no defense of the organization's performance, nor does any council member praise its contribution to the war effort.

The first major concern about the Pioneer organization was its invisibility in the public sphere, especially among children. Council member Kulichenko declared that "a major organizational defect of the Pioneers' organization is the fact that at present, the organization has completely merged with the school, and that it does not act outside of school walls. In reality, the Pioneer movement is absent It is hard to draw a line between a Pioneer and a student."²¹ Council member Morozov agreed, "there is no evident Pioneers' movement at present."²² Any public evidence of Pioneer activity – parades, marching to drums, line-ups, and so on – had evaporated, a sure sign that the organization itself was "on the decline."²³ Another council member, Schneiderov, swore that all the symbols and traditions of the Pioneers had vanished.²⁴ The Pioneer organization had been moved within and bound intimately to the environment of the schoolhouse in the

²⁰ Mikhailov had been Komsomol Secretary since 1937. He was appointed in the wake of the Purges, which eliminated the entire leadership of the Komsomol. Interestingly, prior to his appointment, Mikhailov had only one year's experience as a rank-and-file Komsomoltsy, and had joined the organization at the age of thirty-one, upon his appointment to the editorship of *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*. Ralph Talcott Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth: A Study of the Congresses of the Komsomol, 1918-1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 213.

²¹ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 9.

²² RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 11.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 14.

1930s, by the Party's direction. By the 1940s, however, the Pioneer organization had melded so completely with the school system that it had no separate identity. Kulichenko continues, "What differentiates the Pioneer organization from schools today and what differentiates the upbringing of children by the Pioneer organization from the upbringing given by schools? Nothing does."²⁵ Though this was, perhaps, the logical outcome of the strategy employed in the 1930s, it was not the *desired* outcome. For two decades, the Pioneer organization had specifically positioned itself to prescribe ideal behavior for children in the Soviet Union. The Pioneer was to be the public face of Soviet childhood, not only to children, but to adults as well. Without a tangible presence – or even a perceived presence – the Pioneer organization was in danger of losing its influence, perhaps even its purpose for existing.

Another grave concern among council members concerned leadership within the Pioneer organization. Secretary Mikhailov contended that the staffing question was the number one priority to be addressed.²⁶ Morozov argued that his investigation revealed that "there is no one to supervise them [the Pioneers], no one to give directions." The children needed "determination, defined goals, and not just general wishes."²⁷ Council member Chukovskii affirmed this sentiment, noting that scarce resources were often wasted because children received no

²⁵ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 10.

²⁶ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 19.

²⁷ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 11.

instruction or guidance from a leader.²⁸ As a result, the organization seemed aimless, impotent. Council member Akhapkin suggested that, in order to combat the high turnover rate, Pioneer leaders should be subject to a minimum commitment of three years. Further, he envisioned a role for discharged veterans within the organization, proposing that former officers would make excellent leaders for children.²⁹ Akhapkin and Mikhailov both pointed out the necessity of requesting that teachers pull double-duty, serving both as educator and Pioneer leader, though this would seem to be problematic considering the issue discussed above. The issue of leadership appeared insurmountable: how could the organization convince youth that working with children was important, in the context of ongoing war? More to the point, how could a seemingly *invisible*, insignificant organization be so persuasive?

It could not. The lack of action and discipline that characterized the Pioneer organization by 1942 was lamented and lambasted by several council members. Schneiderov stressed, “We must build the Pioneer organization as an organization of action . . . concentrat[ing] all work around real community deeds and around the needs of the government.”³⁰ Public perception, according to Schneiderov, was that the Pioneers did nothing useful. Children loved the Timur movement because it involved action; the Pioneers, apparently, were perceived as

²⁸ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, 16.

²⁹ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 18.

³⁰ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 15.

the antithesis of this. In fact, a later report from Kuibyshev recounts that Timur teams and Pioneer troops were pitted against one another, as competitors, rather than the preferred scenario in which Pioneer links or troops were the leaders of the Timurites.³¹ Chukovskii, who based his comments on a ten-month stint with a childrens' evacuation commission in Uzbekistan, noted not only a sad lack of initiative and interest among Pioneers there, but also acts among the children that could only be described as wicked: "I saw Pioneers with red ties who reminded me of small 'Hitlers' who wanted to be evil for the sake of evil."³² He saw children throw dirt into the eyes of monkeys at the zoo, dirt at people on trams, rocks and nails at cars. In the childrens' homes, he alleged seeing child perpetrators of rape, theft, and bullying.³³ Morozov viewed the Pioneer organization as entirely too forgiving of children's antics and a shoddy work ethic.³⁴ Council member Martianova blamed the children's poor behavior on boredom. They "have nothing else to do" but misbehave; therefore, the Pioneer organization ought to step in and increase their collective work load. The best way, in her opinion, to inspire children to action was to appeal to their patriotism. Children ought to be inspired to love the motherland and to hate the enemy. Since the children have knives anyway, she asserted, the Pioneer organization should

³¹ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 52. This is a 1943 report from Obkom Secretary A. Gol'din to Mikhailov and the Central Committee.

³² RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 16.

³³ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 17.

³⁴ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 11.

make them want to turn those weapons on the fascists rather than each other.³⁵

Akhapkin asserted the Pioneer organization could address concerns about discipline and work ethic through increased emphasis on military training.³⁶

Whatever the solution, the deplorable work ethic among children had to be addressed if the Pioneers were going to resurrect any sort of image as an organization of action and relevance.

Finally, the members of the council agreed that the Pioneer organization itself needed “radical restructuring.”³⁷ Akhapkin suggested that the whole organization needed “strengthening” – the structure of the organization, its tasks, the role of its leaders, its oaths and traditions.³⁸ Schneiderov criticized the organization for being insensitive to the age range of children involved, proposing instead that there ought to be gradations within the Pioneers (similar to the Boy Scouts’ Wolf Cubs, Tiger Cubs, and Webelos) based on age and age-appropriate tasks and activities.³⁹ The Pioneer organization had undergone moderate updating, especially in terms of tasks or language, from time to time throughout its history. What these council members were suggesting, however, went beyond change of language or venue. The organization itself appeared to be broken and in need of internal repair. Whatever the concern, the situation was deemed to be

³⁵ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 17.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 13.

³⁸ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 17.

³⁹ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 14.

dire. Chukovsky melodramatically warned, “If we do not arrive at some drastic resolutions at this time, then the entire children’s generation may die.”⁴⁰

Secretary Mikhailov concluded the meeting, and drafted the September 1942 report which resulted from it, “Six Major Shortcomings in the Work of the Pioneer Organization and Measures to Be Taken to Eliminate These Shortcomings.”⁴¹ His ideas form the core of the final proposal. The Komsomol, he claimed, had dropped the ball in working with children, and “as a result, the Pioneer organization’s image [was] growing vague and ill-defined,” its attributes forgotten. While he condemned the obscurity into which the Pioneer organization had fallen, he firmly reasserted the relationship between the Pioneer organization and schools. The Pioneer organization was to remain in schools, to work with schools in promoting academic achievement, and to operate under the authority of school principals. Rather than restructuring the Pioneer organization, Mikhailov suggested reeducation. New laws, traditions, and symbols were not needed; the existing laws, traditions, and symbols simply needed to be retaught to a cohort who had forgotten them, he argued. Though the organization itself needed little in the way of restructuring, it could benefit from the updating of rhetoric to correspond with wartime realities. To address the issue of discipline and action, the organization was to be imbued with a new militarization. The Pioneer organization was not to be an organization of “helpless and pampered sissies” but

⁴⁰ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 16.

⁴¹ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 1-8.

of warriors-in-training. Children should be inspired to heroic action, under the aegis of the Pioneers – working, fighting, or studying for the glory of motherland and Party. The romanticism of participation in the war effort would draw children to the Pioneers. As for the issue of age-appropriateness, Mikhailov snorted, “Let’s face reality here . . . we are treating the children as if they were adults, so there is no age principle there.”⁴² This “reality” – that the war signaled an abrupt break with normalcy – was to be reflected in the qualities and responsibilities that the Young Pioneers emphatically supported in the organization’s post-1942 efforts at recovery. Children had already taken on grown-up characteristics out of necessity or coercion; rather than attempt to counter that reality with a fantasy of childhood restored, the Pioneer leadership used it as the foundation for their drive to regain visibility and reputation.

The council’s report begins, “In many families, parents cannot devote the same attention to their children as they did before the war.”⁴³ What should have been a prime opportunity for the Pioneer organization to mold and shape young Soviet children was lost in the early years of the war. Rather than actively influencing the minds and activities of children, the Pioneer organization settled into oblivion, out of sight and out of mind in Soviet society. The organization, though, was determined to rectify this situation. Beginning in 1943, the Pioneer

⁴² RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 19-20.

⁴³ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 1.

organization began the slow struggle to reassert its influence and prescriptive powers among the children of the Soviet Union.

CHAPTER 5

WHAT IS A PIONEER?:

SOVIET CHILDREN AND IDENTITY IN WARTIME

I would rather die myself than let the Motherland die.

Zoya Kirilova, 6th grade¹

Essential to the daunting task of reviving the languishing Pioneer organization was the rescue of its reputation. The Komsomol leadership tasked with this responsibility quickly moved to redefine and reestablish the identity of the Pioneer within the organization, among children, and in Soviet society. Above all, the Pioneer had to be reinserted into the Soviet narrative and public eye as a positive force for the state-defined good; in short, the Pioneer had to be a hero. Careful culling, editing, and dissemination of numerous stories, anecdotes, literature, and ideas by the Pioneer organization resulted in an attractive, yet demanding, definition of heroism for children. This calculated definition of heroism provides insight into the state's wartime values and its expectations for children. Intentional or otherwise, the Young Pioneers immensely complicated the traditional image of the Soviet child in war. Whereas state propaganda overwhelmingly portrayed children as victims, Pioneer messages recast them as actors with grown-up responsibilities and sacrifices to make.

¹ From a letter printed in *Pionerskaia Pravda* and read in a "Pioneer Dawn" broadcast, 1 January 1943. GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 18, l. 5.

* * *

One component of the “Measures” handed down by the Komsomol’s Central Committee Council on Children’s Education involved the updating of rhetoric in Pioneer oaths and the reeducation of Young Pioneer leaders in the principles and structure of the organization. The Komsomol Central Committee moved quickly on the first matter. By mid-October of 1942, the committee had drafted and adopted new language for the Pioneer oath, laws, and customs designed to more manifestly mimic the bellicose language made familiar to children during the war.

Prior to 1942, beginning at initiation into the organization, Pioneers were asked to solemnly promise:

I, a Young Pioneer of the Soviet Union, in front of my comrades, solemnly swear that I will firmly stand for the cause of Lenin and Stalin for the victory of communism, and that I will honestly and unfalteringly carry out the laws and customs of a Pioneer.²

² *Pionerskaia organizatsia imeni lenina* (Moskva: UchPedGiz, 1950), 41, as quoted in Ina Schlesinger, “The Pioneer Organization: The Evolution of Citizenship Education in the Soviet Union” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1967), 84. The original pledge, composed in 1922, substituted the words “defend the cause of the working classes in the struggle for the liberation of the workers and peasants of the world” for “stand for the cause of Lenin and Stalin for the victory of communism.” *Iunyi pioner: posobie dlia instruktora* (Moskva: Novaia Moskva, 1924), 57.

Mikhailov and the Central Committee rewrote the Pioneer oath this way:

I, a Young Pioneer of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, in front of my comrades, solemnly promise to the Great Stalin, the Bolshevik Party, and the Leninist Komsomol, to live, study, and work in a way that will make me worthy of the high rank of a Young Leninist.

I promise to be disciplined, honest, hard-working, courageous, and tough.

I hate the fascist invaders with all my heart and I will tirelessly prepare to defend the Motherland. In this, I swear by the names of the soldiers who gave their lives for our happiness. I will always remember that their blood burns on my Pioneer tie and on our Red Banner.³

According to the adults who directed the Young Pioneer organization, *this* was the sort of fiery, passionate language to which children could relate in wartime. This oath captured the tough attitude and dedication the committee believed to be lacking among Pioneers: the word “work” is repeated or implied three times, children are invited to share in the defense of their country, and, for those children foolhardy enough to ask, “Why should I?” there is a healthy dose of guilt meted out in the final paragraph. The method by which a child could “stand . . . for the

³ Tsentr Khraneniia Dokumentov Molodezhnykh Organizatsii (hereafter cited as TsKhDMO) f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 59.

victory of communism” was made much more explicit in the new version of the pledge. Values of self-sacrifice and patriotism, hatred for the enemy, action on behalf of Stalin and the Motherland – themes already familiar to Soviet youth and adults – were now officially prescribed for children. Three times a year, at Young Pioneer induction ceremonies, these words would be repeated by children new to the organization and heard by children already in membership; more often, these words would be visible in classrooms or painstakingly copied into school notebooks.

The commandments of the Young Pioneers evolved in a similar fashion. The original commandments (1923) are as follows:

1. The Pioneer is faithful to the cause of the working class.
2. The Pioneer is the youngest brother and helper of the Komsomoltsy and communists.
3. The Pioneer is a comrade of [other] Pioneers and workers’ children worldwide.
4. The Pioneer loves labor.
5. The Pioneer is honest and truthful (his word is like granite).
6. The Pioneer is healthy, robust, and never falls in spirit.
7. The Pioneer strives for knowledge. Knowledge and ability are strength in the struggle for the workers’ cause.

8. The Pioneer carries out his duties quickly and accurately.⁴

Changes to this list of rules detailing prescribed behaviors and attitudes were substantial, both in concept and content. Here are the commandments approved on October 13, 1942:

1. The Pioneer is faithful to the Leninist-Stalinist cause.
2. The Pioneer fervently loves his motherland and hates its enemies.
3. The Pioneer considers it an honor to become a member of the Leninist Komsomol.
4. The Pioneer is honest and truthful. His word is as strong as steel.
5. The Pioneer is as courageous as an eagle. He despises cowards.
6. The Pioneer has a sharp eye, muscles of iron, and nerves of steel.
7. The Pioneer needs knowledge like a weapon in battle.
8. The Pioneer is not a sissy. He is hard-working.
9. The Pioneer is the pride of his family and his school.
10. The Pioneer is an example for all children.⁵

⁴ “Iz organizatsionnogo polozheniia detskikh kommunisticheskikh grupp iunykh pionerov imeni spartake. Utverzhdeno Buiro TsK RKSM 28 avgusta 1923 g.” TsKhDMO, TsK VLKSM f. 1, op. 3, d. 8, l. 58, as printed in Tsentr Khraneniia Dokumentov Molodezhnykh Organizatsii, *Molodezhnoe dvizhenie v Rossii, 1917-1928: dokumenty i materialy, chast' 1 i 2* (Moskva: Tsentr Khraneniia Dokumentov Molodezhnykh Organizatsii), 21, 1993.

⁵ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 58. Earlier drafts are located at l. 60 and l. 62.

The original commandments emphasize the international character of the communist movement, reflecting a time when the Bolsheviks still preached that widespread proletarian revolution was imminent. The rewritten commandments mirror both the changes of the past decades and the immediacy of the war. Stalin looms large in the new version of these laws, directly (commandment #1) and indirectly, in references to a word “as strong as steel” and “nerves of steel” (commandments #4 and #6). As in the pledge, the committee’s desire to emphasize work ethic and vigorousness, patriotism, and accountability among children is apparent. Compared with the commandments that served as the standard for two decades, there is a physicality to these new laws that is fascinating. Far beyond simply being “healthy” and “robust,” as listed in the earlier iteration, the new and improved Pioneer is to acquire “a sharp eye” and “muscles of iron” (commandment #6). Even personality traits such as courageousness (commandment #5) and studiousness (commandment # 7) are assigned word-pictures that increase their masculinity or macho appeal. Knowledge is not just a tool, but a weapon. Cowardice is not only discouraged, it is despised. Honesty is not simply virtuous, it is a sign of potency and power. Tellingly, one of the proposed but discarded commandments read, “The Pioneer is a faithful and sensitive comrade.”⁶ The committee was not concerned about

⁶ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 60. Though it is not a part of this project, a gendered reading of the Pioneer organization would be quite fruitful. From its inception, the Pioneer

displaying the Pioneer's "soft side" or emotional well-being, but about his or her attitude toward tangible, physical contributions to the war effort. Again, the objective was to raise the visibility and prestige of the Pioneer organization. Outward acts of heroism and sacrifice, whether small or large, were necessary to resuscitate the Pioneer image. Introversions, acts of kindness, and emotional fitness would not aid the effort and were, therefore, expendable.

In order to balance the sometimes abstract commandments, the customs (*obychai*) of the Pioneers provided a list of daily behaviors children were expected to abide by. This is the original list of customs (1923):

1. The Pioneer gets up early in the morning, washes hands, neck, and ears, brushes his teeth, bathes his body, and does gymnastics.
2. The Pioneer rises, drinks, eats, and works in fixed time and always knows today's date and what time it is.
3. The Pioneers value their time as well as others'.
4. The Pioneers write and speak concisely. They know that loquaciousness is a sign of idleness.
5. The Pioneers all do their best. They know how to work in any conditions, to discover an outlet for all circumstances.

organization used language that could be construed as more masculine than feminine, though during the war, it becomes increasingly so.

6. The Pioneer should work with an axe, chisel, hammer, plane, and know how to turn on and turn off motors.
7. The Pioneer is thrifty with social property. He uses books carefully, equipment skillfully, and clothing appropriately.
8. Pioneers guard the health of the others; they practice cleanliness, don't litter, and don't spit on the floor.
9. Pioneers don't smoke and don't drink (wine and tobacco are poison).
10. Pioneers don't curse. Cursing is either a slave or a master.
11. Pioneers don't put their hands in their pockets, it is a harmful habit.
12. A pioneer has bright eyes and fine hearing. He attentively listens and precisely takes notes.
13. Pioneers work together, helping each other, working collectively, quicker and better than working alone.
14. Pioneers always remember these rules and customs. Without these it is impossible to be a real Pioneer.⁷

The customs differ from the commandments in that they demonstrate how the adults who directed the Pioneer organization believed children ought to act. The commandments convey ideal personality traits or values while the customs explain ideal behavior. These original customs, for the most part, tend to focus on

⁷ TsKhDMO, TsK VLKSM f. 1, op. 3, d. 8, l. 58, in TsKhDMO, *Molodezhnoe dvizhenie*, 21-22.

what might be considered proper etiquette, especially in light of the prohibition on “uncivilized” habits such as spitting, cursing, or personal hygiene. They are indicative of a desire to lionize working class skills while simultaneously attempting to improve or transform working class behavior, manners, and attitudes. In this sense, the commandments are reflective of the NEP era and its sometimes ambivalent, uncertain attitude towards workers, the bourgeoisie, and social change.

The much expanded and much updated list of customs promulgated in September 1942 by the committee reflects the perceived crisis within the Young Pioneer organization:

1. Pioneers tirelessly prepare to defend the Motherland. They are hardy, do physical exercises every morning, and participate in sports. They learn to walk fast, run, belly-crawl, swim, ski, camouflage themselves, dig in, and administer first aid.
2. Pioneers honorably carry out their primary duty to the Motherland – they receive only “good” and “excellent” grades at school. The book is a Pioneer’s great friend. Every day, Pioneers read books, newspapers, and magazines.
3. Pioneers train to weather hardships beginning at a young age. They love work and are not afraid of menial labor. They can take care of

themselves. They can mend clothing, repair shoes, and cook a meal.

They know how to light a fire in any weather, find their way by the sun and the stars, distinguish animals' tracks, and use a compass and maps.

They are not disheartened by difficult circumstances, and do not become discouraged in the face of obstacles.

4. Pioneers set the standard in discipline. They are never late and are always neatly dressed and groomed. They value their own time and that of others, never put off until tomorrow what they can do today, and always finish what they have started.

5. Pioneers respect elders and always protect younger children. They help their families in any way they can. They are always cheerful and polite to their elders.

6. Pioneers are devoted friends of the Red Army and Red Navy. They take care of fighters' families, the wounded, and the invalids of the Patriotic War.

7. Pioneers are the initiators of new and useful undertakings, interesting things to do, and exciting games.

8. Pioneers value the people's property and help protect it.

9. Pioneers value the honor of the collective. They know how to work together and rest collectively. They will never permit the banner of their

troop or unit to become stained with an act of hooliganism, cowardice, dishonesty, or any other act unworthy of a Young Leninist-Stalinist.⁸

The new customs, in the most straightforward of ways, capture the fears and hopes of the leaders of the Pioneer organization. The complaints and charges about Pioneers raised by the Komsomol committee – laziness, boredom, ill-naturedness, destructiveness, apathy, abusive behavior – are addressed in these customs, with the antithesis of each. Wartime jobs for Pioneers permeate the list (customs #1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7); these include military training, scholarship, household chores, survival skills, care for families of soldiers (i.e., the Timur movement), care for soldiers, and leadership among non-Pioneer children. Children were drawn into participation in the war, even on the homefront, by encouragement from all Pioneer channels to engage in military training. *Pioner* ran regular features illustrating and explaining physical exercises and skills that could be used in time of war. One article, in late 1942, exhorts children to improve their ability to ski because of its use in military scouting. Even throwing snowballs at a snowman takes on martial significance as training for accuracy in lobbing hand grenades.⁹ The radio program “Pioneer Dawn” ran daily programming that instructed children in the art of camouflage, tracking, scouting, and shooting. Military training exercises – running, putting on gas masks, antiaircraft defense,

⁸ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 61. Underlining is from the original document.

⁹ “‘Dzhigitovka’ na lizhax,” *Pioner* 12 (December 1942), 33.

shooting – were incorporated into the school day. While it may be appalling to think of children in such activities or roles, the reality is that Soviet children were bombarded with images from the war. Such military training might have been appealing to many children, and certainly helped to combat the perception that Pioneers did nothing, or worse, only boring things.

While ostensibly upholding the ideal of collectivism (custom #9), these customs promote a great degree of self-sufficiency among Pioneers. It was common knowledge that parents were largely absent in many children's lives – fathers at the front, mothers at the factory or farm – so survival skills and knowledge of household skills (custom # 3) were considered paramount. In addition, Pioneer leaders were known to be in short supply, hence the directive that good Pioneers could entertain themselves and other children (custom #7), included perhaps to alleviate some of the Komsomol's responsibility for the Pioneer organization's egregious shortcomings in the leadership department.

The final custom places the burden of fixing the observed shortcomings squarely on the shoulders of the Pioneers themselves. Indicative of the new Pioneer commandment, "The Pioneer is an example for all children" (commandment #10), Pioneers are challenged to uphold the honor of the organization by avoiding any actions which might reflect poorly on the organization, such as hooliganism, cowardice, or other "unworthy" actions. The new, revived Pioneer organization had no room for thugs, opportunists, or

deadbeats, but neither did the committee want sissified prigs or incompetent know-it-alls. The committee was attempting to convey a delicate balance between pride and arrogance, work and study, individualism and collectivism, independence and responsibility, all in the context of a struggle for the nation's – and an organization's – existence.

Qualities of Heroism for Pioneers

Once the Pioneer leadership in the Komsomol had decided what qualities a Pioneer ought to possess, this message had to be distributed to its primary audience – Soviet children. Ideally, they would encounter the newly-modified pledge, commandments, and customs of the Pioneer organization in link, troop, and detachment meetings, but to reach even more kids, the organization used various children's media to disseminate their expectations. The Pioneer leadership recognized the usefulness of the hero, having had enormous success with the Pavlik Morozov canonization in the 1930s, and hoped that the tactic would work again in the 1940s. Building on the supposition that “what captivates the children more than anything else these days is an immense interest in the heroism of our fighters,” the organization launched an intentional campaign to mold and refine the definition of heroism for children across the Soviet Union.¹⁰

¹⁰ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 2.

Definitions of the heroic most commonly appeared in narrative or visual rather than pedantic form. Anecdotes recounting the actions of various types of heroes pack the pages of the Pioneer newspaper, *Pionerskaia Pravda* (*Pioneer Truth*), the transcripts of the organization's radio program, "Pionerskaia Zor'ka" ("Pioneer Dawn"), and the contents of two children's magazines published by the Komsomol, *Pioner* (*Pioneer*) and *Murzilka*.¹¹ *Pionerskaia Pravda* was the primary press organ of the Young Pioneers. The Pioneers first put the paper out in 1925. In the 1920s and 1930s it was published semi-weekly, although it came out only sporadically during the war. While it was not the only program dedicated to an audience of children – the two hours of scheduled childrens' programming also included music, literature, current events, and a game show ("Try to Guess!") designed to teach military concepts – "Pionerskaia Zor'ka," according to one scholar, was the only daily radio newspaper in the country.¹² While precise listenership among children is impossible to ascertain, it is

¹¹ The introduction to the archival fond which contains transcripts of *Pionerskaia zor'ka* or *Pioneer Dawn* states that the program was broadcast four times a week, but the date of the actual transcripts and broadcasts indicate that the show was broadcast daily on Radio Moscow – the most powerful domestic and international broadcasting station in the Soviet Union at the time – with sporadic days off, beginning in October of 1941. This dissertation draws from a sample of over eighty transcripts of *Pioneer Dawn* dated October 1941 to June 1945. Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, f. R-6903, op. 16, introductory note. Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii hereafter cited as GA RF. *Pionerskaia Pravda* hereafter cited as *PP*. As the title *Pravda* is common usage in English, I have chosen to retain the transliterated title of *Pionerskaia Pravda* for use in this dissertation. Though fifteen Pioneer children's magazines were published prior to the war, only three were published during the war: *Pioner*, *Murzilka*, and *Druzniye Rebiata*. Issues published between January 1941 and January 1946 of *Pioner* and *Murzilka* are used in this dissertation.

¹² Pavel Semenovich Gurevich and Vsevolod Nikolaevich Rushnikov, *Sovetskoe radioveshchanie: Stranitsy istori* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1976), 205-207.

important to note that broadcast radio was the leading source of firsthand news in the Soviet Union during the war. The state knew that it was the most far-reaching medium it possessed, making broadcasting technology and radio workers protected assets during the early days of the war and evacuation. By early 1943, radio broadcasting was up to its prewar signal strength.¹³ Childrens' magazine publication dropped dramatically during the war, from fifteen titles in the prewar period to three between 1941 and 1946. *Pioneer*, a magazine aimed at Pioneer-age children, and *Murzilka*, a magazine for young children, had been around since the 1920s, and provide additional sources for the examination of stories and, particularly, visual images. Both magazines are illustrated with a wealth of drawings, both professional and child-generated. Contents of each typically included serial stories, poems, war-related science articles, tales from Russia's history, and instructional pieces on physical culture, games, and, occasionally, art. Other sources of heroic narrative include curriculum suggested by the Pioneer leadership and Pioneer handbooks published during the war. As models for children, the heroes chosen by the state were carefully constructed to deliver approved ideas about ideal behaviors and motivations.

The following is a story from "Pioneer Dawn," broadcast in 1942.

¹³ James von Geldern, "Radio Moscow: The Voice from the Center," in Richard Stites, ed., *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 44-45, 58-59.

The village where Shura Yanokov lives is located far behind the line of the front – in Kirovskaia oblast. Shura studies in the fourth grade. He is going to take finals for the first time in his life. Even last fall he spoke about it with his father.

“Shura, when you start going to fifth grade, we will celebrate that day,” said his father.

But Shura will not be able to celebrate this significant day. His father left for the front to defend the motherland.

Now is a very important time on the collective farm, just like in schools. They have started to sow. Schoolchildren help the farm. Shura also works in the fields. But he is not behind in his school work. Here’s what he writes:

“I work at the collective farm on Sundays and also after school. But my school work doesn’t suffer from it. I organize my day in the following way: come home from school, have lunch, do my homework, review the material which I learned that day, and then go to work.

Now my father is in a hospital. When I take my finals, I will write him a long letter, telling him what they asked me and what I answered. I will be answering well so that father can be proud of my grades and can get well soon . . .

A man always has enough time when he knows how to use it. Organize yourself, and then you will find time to do physical exercises and military practice every day.”¹⁴

The state’s proposed heroes contribute to the war effort in any way possible. Specifically, heroes *work*. In this narrative, Shura, though not subject to the horrors of frontline warfare, has suffered in a fashion familiar to many children. His father has gone to the front and is unable to mark special childhood occasions with him. His daily schedule has been disrupted by the war. Work on the local collective farm shares time with school and daily military preparedness training. Note that there is no time for play in Shura’s day. He uncomplainingly preaches the value of time management to other children.

Other stories echo this emphasis on work. Fifth grader Zhenya Geras’kin was praised for balancing his school work with four hours of daily work at a welding shop.¹⁵ Eight students ranging in age from eight to fourteen were marked to be recognized because each had contributed more than four hundred workdays to the war effort in 1942.¹⁶ A mandatory minimum of fifty workdays per year had

¹⁴ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 9, l. 330-331. If Shura is in fourth-fifth grade, he is probably about ten years old.

¹⁵ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 18, l. 1.

¹⁶ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 15, l. 154. Of the eight, seven are boys. Four are from various oblasts in European Russia; of the other four, two are from Primorskii Krai (at the juncture of Russia, China, and Korea), one from the Chuvash ASSR, and one from Kazakh SSR. A “workday unit” was measured in output. For example, if harvesting two puds of grain was considered a day’s work, then a child who harvested 12 puds in one day would be able to record

already been established by Sovnarkom for collective farm residents twelve to sixteen, so overachievers' statistics were constantly trumpeted.¹⁷ Frequently groups of school children or Pioneer troops were recognized for raising animals, caring for soldiers in hospitals, collecting metal scraps and medicinal plants, and digging defensive trenches. A January 1942 "Pioneer Dawn" broadcaster harangued: "Children! . . . What are you doing? How are you helping to destroy the Hitler-following bandits? How are you helping the motherland which is wounded by the brutal beast? Maybe are you sitting, doing nothing, and waiting for the victory? Eating, sleeping, partying, thinking only about your own benefit and about your life?"¹⁸

Concern that children lacked a strong work ethic or were somehow deficient in the desire to work is suggested repeatedly in Young Pioneer internal documents. In the Komsomol Central Committee, leaders worried that "children have nothing to do," that "none of the children would help" those in need, and, worst of all, that some children refused to work or obey adults.¹⁹ The Young Pioneers even published a handbook in 1942 designed to "get children interested in working," a sort of how-to book for kids on household chores such as cooking,

completion of six workdays. Less clear (to me, anyway) is the system of compensation for workdays. Memoirs suggest that some workdays were compensated with extra pay or rations while others were strictly volunteer work.

¹⁷ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 17, l. 3.

¹⁸ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 5, l. 182.

¹⁹ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 18, 19ff.

sewing, home repair, and cleaning.²⁰ As mentioned above, the newly-propagated Pioneer pledge emphasized work as a key component of the Pioneer experience, and the rewriting of the Pioneer commandments in 1942 had addressed work ethic similarly: “The Pioneer is not a sissy. He is hard-working.”²¹

It seems clear that the state expected children to contribute to the war effort through labor. The jobs they could be expected to perform were numerous and their participation essential.²² The message dominated the children’s press. Headlines from *Pionerskaia Pravda* in the summer of 1943 include “Go to War with Weeds!”, “Pioneers in the Fields”, and “How We Work.”²³ Even the annual issue, usually dedicated to end-of-year school exams and well wishes for summer vacation, included an article in 1943 entitled, “The Soldiers Await Your Help” within a full-page spread commanding Pioneers and schoolchildren to collect medicinal plants and berries for the front.²⁴ The magazine *Pioner* ran monthly features detailing and instructing children in various agricultural tasks, child care, and domestic skills such as food preservation.²⁵ Even *Murzilka*, the magazine whose audience was young children, clearly dictated this expectation. Whereas cover illustrations prior to the war commonly depict folk tales, children playing,

²⁰ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 67-72.

²¹ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 58.

²² The next chapter - Chapter Six - is dedicated to describing and discussing these tasks.

²³ *Pionerskaia Pravda* (Moscow), 30 June 1943, p. 1; 14 July 1943, p. 1; 21 July 1943, p. 3. *Pionerskaia Pravda* hereafter cited as *PP*.

²⁴ *PP*, 26 May 1943, No. 21 (2742), p. 3.

²⁵ See “Bol’she metalla, bol’she oruzhiia...”, “Vam zadaniie – interestnoe i boevoe!”, “Pcheli”, and “Zapisniia knizhka” in *Pioner* 6 (June 1943), pp. 20, 24-26, and *Pioner* 7 (July 1943), pp. 40-45.

or nature scenes, cover illustrations during the war show young children engaged in labor. A 1942 cover shows children engaged in the task of rebuilding and repairing a building. A young girl in the foreground paints a window frame, while a boy carries lumber; another boy is repairing a roof as another climbs a ladder to hammer a nail.²⁶ Though the tasks might vary, the expectation remained clear: heroes are supposed to work.

A second story, also broadcast via radio on “Pioneer Dawn”:

Drunken German officers dragged Tatiana Ivanovna, a teacher, out into the street. The young woman was losing consciousness; . . . [her] face swelled and became purple. Her red dress was torn, breasts exposed, and her neck and shoulders were covered in blood. . . .

They tortured the teacher for a long time, but she did not tell them anything and she refused to lead them to the partisans’ camp.

Tatiana Ivanovna was a colonel’s daughter; her father was fighting in the South front. She died without fear and with dignity, as a daughter of a Soviet soldier, as heroes die.

²⁶ *Murzilka* 7 (July 1942), p. 1.

The Germans hung the dead teacher on an old tree by the school. The lightweight body stretched and turned towards the village as if the girl wanted to say good-bye to the world for which she died.

Schoolchildren who ran from all over the village gathered around . . . Silently, they watched the executioners . . . the hearts of the children were burning with a very adult-like, fierce madness. Sharp pain penetrated their innocent children's souls – she was their favorite teacher.

Tatiana Ivanovna was always with the children. She knew many interesting tales and stories . . . She taught children to hate everyone who wanted to enslave the Russian people.

How enraged she was when the Germans stepped onto Soviet land! Those dishonorable killers wanted to deprive us of freedom and happiness. Fascist troops brought oppression, slavery and death

Among the children, one girl stood out; she was strong, wearing a sailor's hat and boyish clothes. Her fast, darting eyes were full of rage. Saying good-bye to her friends, she shook their hands like an adult and pointing her head towards the Germans she

said angrily: “Watch them. . . if you find anything, hide it: we are not little, we will fight.”

Then she added, implying many things, adult-like: “We will avenge Tatiana Ivanovna! We will never forget!”²⁷

At least two dominant messages about Soviet heroism are revealed in this astonishing story. First, heroes die. The values of self-sacrifice and intense loyalty are certainly not unique to the Soviet experience; they are common to most belligerent countries. The honorable death of heroes – soldiers, partisans, parents, teachers, children – is characteristic of narratives for children throughout the war. In this story, a beloved teacher displays bravery by refusing to provide information to the Germans and dies a public, but heroic, death. Her death has meaning – she protects the local partisan movement – and purpose, as it provides her students with an essential example. As the daughter of a Red Army officer, she upholds not only her family name, but the honor of her nation with her final actions. Her torture, strangulation, and execution are described in graphic detail, in language usually considered inappropriate for children. The passage, and others like it, reflect the wartime intensification of rhetoric evident in the rewritten Pioneer pledge, commandments, and customs.

²⁷ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 2, l. 264-266.

In the story, the teacher's execution inspires her students. Their hearts burn with "madness," having seen with their own eyes the confirmation of all the teacher's ideas about the Nazis. To the Pioneer leadership, purposeless death was a useless standard of behavior. All the sacrifices depicted in Pioneer narratives glorify the national effort in the war in some way. In a letter published in *Pioneer Pravda*, "Teacher-Hero," a soldier at the front writes to some students, recounting the bravery and "glorious death" of the students' former teacher. He exhorts them to remember their teacher fondly, always keeping in mind that he died for the motherland.²⁸ The lead illustration in a *Pioneer* article titled "Partisan Tanya," an account of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya's martyrdom at the hands of the Germans, is a close-up of Zoya's dead, slightly bloated face, with the noose still wrapped around her neck and her hair blowing in the wind. The author exhorts children to sacrifice themselves – literally, to die – "as she did."²⁹

Children could also die heroically: another story, this from a "Pioneer Dawn" broadcast, relays that

Soviet children, if captured by the paws of the fascist executioners, are being very brave and proud. In fascist-occupied Lieza, a German officer demanded a little twelve-year-old girl show him the location of the

²⁸ *PP*, 30 June 1943, No. 26 (2747), p. 2.

²⁹ "Partizanka Taniia," *Pioneer* 1-2 (January-February 1942), p. 5-7.

farm's animals. Nura refused to answer him. She was shot. Forever remember and glorify Nura Drozdova – a young hero of our country.³⁰

However contrived these stories of heroism might have been, the horrors of war were real. In the first desperate years of the war, millions of children lived in occupied territory and could into contact with the enemy at any time. Rather than sugar-coating reality for its young audience, however, the state preferred to exploit it – perhaps to build patriotism, perhaps to excuse its own atrocities. Many nations, the Soviet Union included, used images of children as victims of war to build adult support for national war efforts.³¹ What is rather shocking here is that the Soviet state used narratives about torture and death – even of children – *for* children.

Repeatedly, Young Pioneer radio emphasized that while annihilating the population of occupied villages and cities, the Germans “[were] killing the

³⁰ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 3, l. 52.

³¹ Soviet propaganda posters, artwork inspired by the war, and wartime photography exhibitions played on the image of the threatened or deceased child to encourage adults to support the war or enlist in the nation's armed services. For examples of Soviet posters and visual images such as V. Serov's "The enemy has been here!" (1942) and V. Koretsky's "Red Army Warriors, Save!", see the Voice of Russia's website dedicated to the 55th anniversary of the war, "Pictorial Art During the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945" at http://www.vor.ru/55/55_9/Plakat.html, accessed March 2005, (Voice of Russia, 2000), M.Z. Kholodkovskaya, *The Great Patriotic War as Seen By Soviet Graphic Artists* (Moscow: Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, 1948), Ye. Zatisev, *The Art Chronicle of the Great Patriotic War* (Moscow: Iskusstvo Publishing House, 1986), and P. A. Snopkov, A. E. Snopkov, and A. F. Shkliaruk, *Plakaty voiny i pobedy, 1941-1945* (Moskva: Kontakt-Kul'tura, 2005), 77, 102, 130, 166-167.

children with special pleasure.”³² The same story recounted the shooting of a six-year-old and a twelve-year-old, and the bombing of the local Pioneer Palace. A “Pioneer Dawn” program from 1941 warned that invading Germans were seizing “young virgins” to molest.³³ A 1943 “Pioneer Dawn” broadcaster read a letter that sent New Year’s greetings from orphans hiding out behind frontlines to listeners: “Kolia, the littlest, is a partisan on our team. His heart is full of burning hatred for the German perverts. He remembers how the fascists drowned his mother and sister in a river. . . .”³⁴ A poem, ostensibly submitted by schoolboy Sergei Baruschin, concluded: “We are remembering atrocities in Minsk and L’vov, / Where we will drag a fascist flag. / For the mountains of corpses, for the rivers of blood, / The cruel enemy will soon answer.”³⁵ In a story entitled “In An Animal’s Tracks,” the “Pioneer Dawn” broadcaster recounts the pillaging of the Ukrainian village of Shtepovka, using the words of village children to help recreate the Nazi invasion. Leaving very little to the imagination of the young listeners, the broadcaster explains how the Germans burned homes, the library, a nursery, and barns, stole money, slaughtered livestock, beat and killed villagers,

³² GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 3, l. 51-52. Informal discussions with other scholars of World War II and children’s issues suggest that this is, indeed, unique in comparison with other countries. In Sweden and Denmark, for example, children’s media attempted to shield children from the war, never mentioning it in radio broadcasts or children’s press. Though the comparison is not entirely parallel considering political systems and war experience, it is useful and thought-provoking. A comparative study of children’s media across Europe in World War II would be enormously helpful in understanding similarities or differences in the child’s experience in war, memories of the war, and contribution to the war effort.

³³ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 2, l. 223.

³⁴ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 18, l. 3.

³⁵ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 5, l. 123.

and raped girls. An excerpt from the story, to illustrate the brutal candor the state considered appropriate for children:

A frightening scene took place in the house of a farm worker Smirnov from a neighboring settlement S. Fascists grabbed his wife, and when Smirnov tried to take her out of the hands of the Germans, they shot him, and cut the wife's head off. In another settlement, the Germans beat a seventy-year-old Ivan S., and shot his invalid daughter. . . . The Fascists were going from house to house demanding that the parents show them where they hid their daughters. In front of fathers and mothers, they used the daughters; in front of children, they used their mothers. A German officer ran down the street to catch a twelve-year-old girl and when he caught her, he dragged her into a shed.³⁶

The second dominant message in the Tatiana Ivanovna narrative recounted above is that heroes despise the enemy. The martyred teacher is lauded for her hatred of the enemy and for passing that hostility towards the “dishonorable killers” on to her pupils. One of her small, enraged protégés speaks ardently in favor of revenge (apparently a good thing) after witnessing Ivanovna's execution. For children, messages about the enemy were made crystal clear: to passionately

³⁶ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 2, l. 283.

hate the Germans was, indeed, admirable. The Germans were given hundreds of labels by the Pioneer press: fascist beasts, snakes, wolves, blood suckers, slayers, cannibals, Hitlerite bandits, bloodthirsty killers, to name a few.³⁷ The magazine *Pioner* consistently uses the derogatory term “fritz” in stories involving the enemy. A drawing by eleven-year-old Eduard Motkina, published in *Murzilka*, depicts German soldiers in various stages of dying, retreating at Stalingrad. Some of the cartoon-like figures have been blown up by mines while others appear to be shot.³⁸ Though the Soviets were part of an alliance opposing the Axis Powers, of which there were at least ten major and minor nations, only Germans were vilified in Pioneer media. No other enemy is mentioned, although in the story above, Ivanovna’s belligerence could theoretically – and conveniently – extend to anyone who “wanted to enslave the Russian people.” Fascism is never defined; children were to equate “fascism” with “evil” by example – and the Pioneers provided plenty of examples of German atrocities.

It is notable that the child-hero in the Ivanovna story is a girl – despite her boyish appearance. There was concern in Pioneer leadership that girls “must be involved to a greater extent in sabotage and subversive activities” against the Germans.³⁹ The Pioneer organization and Narkompros may have been working at

³⁷ See, for examples, GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 2, l. 32, 33, 186, 209, and 235.

³⁸ “Ha razgrom vraga!: risunki chitatelei ‘Murzilki’,” *Murzilka* 2-3 (February-March 1943), 13. The student’s drawing is hand-titled, “The retreat of the German soldiers at Stalingrad” (“Ostupleniie nemetskikh boisk pod Stalingradom”).

³⁹ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 53, d. 277, l. 116.

cross-purposes here, or at least, sending mixed messages to girls of Pioneer age. As stated in Chapter Two, in 1943, coeducational schooling was ended in order to provide gender-specific skills, military training for boys and home and family life skills for girls. All stories of frontline soldiers broadcast on “Pioneer Dawn” had male main characters. Soldiers were very often referred to as “our brother and fathers” – never as mothers or sisters, despite the fact that the Soviet Union had more women in combat during the Great Patriotic War than any other country and that fascist ideology supported exactly the kind of traditional female role being indirectly advocated by the Soviet state.⁴⁰ The gender messages on “Pioneer Dawn” can be viewed as another sign of the Stalinist retreat on women’s issues and supports the idea that placing women in combat was merely a “temporary measure” of gender equality not intended to fundamentally change gender roles.⁴¹

The inconsistency is indicative of the ambivalence the Soviet state felt about the place of women in society. Attempts at reconciling these ideas were made, though sometimes with unintentionally comical results. Antonina Petrova, “girl guerrilla fighter” in a partisan troop from the Leningrad region was described as a “stalwart fighter” and “splendid scout” who “spent her brief leisure

⁴⁰ The Soviet Union was the first to use women in combat in World War II, and the first to use women in combat in any significant numbers. By the end of the war, about one million women had seen combat experience. See Reina Pennington, *Wings, Women, and War: Soviet Airwomen in World War II Combat*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001), or Kazimira J. Cottam, *Women in War and Resistance: Selected Biographies of Soviet Women Soldiers*, (Nepean, ON: New Military Publishing, 1998).

⁴¹ Pennington, 173.

moments in serving the personal needs of the men,” mending, washing, darning socks, and cooking. Petrova was named Hero of the Soviet Union, posthumously, for killing not only herself, but also a fellow partisan who basely surrendered once Germans overran their camp.⁴² Maybe the two worlds of ideal femininity could come together.

This ambivalence did not extend to attitudes towards the Nazis, and children were encouraged to join the state’s hate-mongering. Rather than shielding children from violence and hate, the state nurtured it and fed it. Topics approved for discussion with schoolchildren in Pioneer meetings included “German atrocities” and “why the fascists should be stopped.”⁴³ One Pioneer leader claimed, “We need to bring up a child in such a way that when a conversation is about fascists, he runs to get a knife.”⁴⁴ In the effort to update the Young Pioneers, the Komsomol stated that “The most important goal of the Pioneer organization must be raising the Pioneers in the spirit of deep devotion to their people and the Bolshevik Party and passionate hatred for the enemies of the motherland, the German fascists. . .”⁴⁵ Sometime during the war, a special wartime humor section was added to *Pioneer Pravda*. The jokes typically played up the alleged cowardice and stupidity of the Germans. Most disturbing,

⁴² V. Ivanov, *The Youth of Heroic Leningrad* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1942), 13-14.

⁴³ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 15, l. 38. (July 7, 1942)

⁴⁴ TsKhDMO f. 1. op. 7, d. 10, l. 18.

⁴⁵ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 4, 12, and 30 ob.

however, is the cartoon's heading: the phrase "Na Shtyke" (literally, "On A Bayonet"; figuratively, "Skewered") with a cartoon figure of an obviously-deceased, mangled, German soldier impaled by a bayonet.⁴⁶ Apparently, nothing should be funnier to children than a dead Nazi – or so the Pioneer leadership attempted to convey. For the state, intense hatred for the enemy was inextricably linked with patriotism and loyalty.

One final story, from a Pioneer handbook published in 1944:

The following story took place in a Ukrainian village in the fall of 1941. A German soldier broke into the house of Galia Dotsenko, a Pioneer. He began rummaging through the things on the shelves, in drawers, closets and trunks.

Galia was holding her school bookbag.

The German approached her . . . and began taking everything out . . . suddenly, it was as if the German was scorched by a flame. A new Pioneer tie fell out of the bag.

"*Klein Kommunist!*" yelled the infuriated German, grabbing the tie. He threw it on the floor and trampled it with his feet.

Galia sprang on the fascist.

⁴⁶ See, for example, *PP*, 14 April 1943, No. 15 (2736), p. 4.

“Why are you trampling my Pioneer tie?” she screamed, and she pushed the German as hard as she could. . . . She snatched her tie from under the German’s feet, ran out of the house, and headed for the forest. She heard shouts and assault rifle fire behind her, but she managed to hide from the pursuers in the woods.

Galia spent the next two years with a guerrilla unit. In October 1943, the Red Army liberated her village from the German invaders. Now Galia goes to school again, and a Pioneer tie glows red on her neck – the same tie that she tore away from a German bandit’s hands in the fall of 1941.⁴⁷

The state’s heroes are Pioneers – and by extension, Soviet. This *Pionerka* displays laudable contempt for the German enemy and admirable horror for the abuse of her piece of the revolutionary flag, her Pioneer tie. Note, too, that by attacking the German soldier to rescue her tie, Galia risks her life. She then completes the heroic narrative by fighting with partisans, working in her own way, for the remainder of the war in her region.

Though stories about Pioneers run throughout the war, child heroes become more and more consciously “Young Pioneer” beginning in late 1942. This coincides with the attempt by the Pioneer organization to resurrect the image

⁴⁷ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 103, l. 95-96.

of the Young Pioneers. Pioneer links, troops, and detachments were challenged to cooperatively achieve for the motherland, often by other links, troops, or brigades. Heroes of children, such as the popular martyr Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, were linked with their Pioneer “roots.” Though Zoya was a Komsomolka when she committed her acts of defiance toward the Germans, she is repeatedly identified as a role model for Pioneers and commended for her activities as a Pioneer.⁴⁸ Individuals with noteworthy accomplishments in *Pioneer Pravda*, for example, are almost always identified by region, school, and Pioneer troop or simply labeled “Pioneer Ivan Ivanovich.” In fact, only rarely are such examples *not* identified as Pioneers. Whether or not a child-hero actually belonged to the Pioneer organization was immaterial. At least one scholar claims that Pioneer Hero #1, Pavlik Morozov, could not possibly have been a Pioneer, as the organization did not exist in his village, yet he was and continues to be inextricably linked to the red scarf of the Pioneers. The organization had fabricated or exaggerated membership facts prior to the war with good results, and there is no reason to believe that this practice would have ceased in wartime.

⁴⁸ See, for example, *PP*, 19 May 1943, No. 20 (2741), p. 1. Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya was a secondary school student who fought as a partisan during the Great Patriotic War. The official story states that she was captured by the Germans after setting fire to parts of Petrishevo, a village occupied by German troops. She was tortured and then hanged in November 1941. She refused to name names (or give her own real name), and she is revered for her defiance towards her captors, allegedly saying something like, “There are two hundred million of us; you can’t hang us all!” just before her execution. She was named a Hero of the Soviet Union in 1942. Since the *glasnost*’ era, there has been controversy surrounding the facts of the story.

These messages about heroism are significant because they communicate the values, desires, and expectations of the Soviet state for Soviet children. That the state should recognize and reward those who vilify the enemy and live only to see his demise during wartime is not very surprising. That the state should hold up for emulation those individuals who contribute mightily to the war effort on the homefront – again, not surprising. Heroes chosen by the state for children to emulate displayed loyalty, courage, dedication, and grew more and more consciously Soviet by war’s end to save a floundering Pioneer organization. In fact, characteristics of heroes for Soviet children are identical to those of society-wide heroes. And this is chilling: there is absolutely no concession for age in the state’s expectations.

The Soviet state expected its children to act like adults in this war. Note that in the Tatiana Ivanovna narrative, the children who witness the death of their teacher suffer “adult-like” emotions, and the young avenger in the story shakes hands “like an adult.” There was no debate within the Pioneer organization about whether or not to expose children to the grim realities of war as there had been within Russian pedagogy during the First World War.⁴⁹ There was no attempt to protect children from the reality of violence, death, hatred, disease, or scarcity that they may experience, either in the present or the future. Even the magazine that targeted the youngest audience, *Murzilka*, interspersed tales such as “The Three

⁴⁹ See Aaron J. Cohen, “Flowers of Evil: Mass Media, Child Psychology, and the Struggle for Russia’s Future during the First World War,” in Marten, *Children and War*, 38-49.

Bears” with stories written by a frontline war correspondent.⁵⁰ Clearly, the fact that much of the land war played out inside the Soviet Union contributed to this decision to rush children into adulthood. It also played into the Pioneer organization’s plans to resuscitate the children’s movement by co-opting and claiming selected wartime experiences of children as its own. Further, it is reflective of Soviet messages, in general, to the population during the Great Patriotic War. As Lisa Kirschenbaum so aptly states, “To a degree unmatched elsewhere, Soviet wartime propaganda reflected and envisioned a catastrophic rupture in the normal world.”⁵¹ According to the narrative, the experience of Nazi cruelty “penetrated the innocent souls” of the children, an experience probably played out in quite a few locations in occupied territory. But, if encountering war and its atrocities caused the loss of childhood for some, the Soviet state’s decision extended this involuntary loss of innocence to millions of other children through the messages of the Pioneer organization.

In so doing, the Young Pioneer organization contested the one-dimensional image of the child – the child as victim – which dominated state propaganda aimed at adults. As mentioned above, images of children in Soviet visual propaganda implied that the protection of children was a prime reason for defending the motherland and destroying the enemy. In poster after poster,

⁵⁰ See, for example, *Murzilka* 8-9 (August-September 1944).

⁵¹ Kirschenbaum, “Our City, Our Hearths, Our Families: Local Loyalties and Private Life in Soviet World War II Propaganda,” *Slavic Review*, 59, 4 (Winter 2000), 827.

photograph after photograph, sketch after sketch, Soviet children are depicted as victims of Nazi brutality – as corpses, as prisoners, as orphans, as homeless, and so on. This straightforward, uncomplicated image of the Soviet child had a clear purpose for adults: to arouse the defensive, compassionate, perhaps outraged, instincts in the viewer, in order to further support for the war. This message was not meant for children; they were merely passive objects in a state propaganda campaign. The Young Pioneers, however, could not be satisfied with this single-faceted image because it undermined their own goals for the revival of the organization.

The Pioneers did not repudiate the state's primary message. According to the Komsomol leadership, experience had shown that children, as well as adults, could be inspired by images or narratives about youthful victims. Based on examples like those described earlier in this chapter, Pioneer media regularly used narratives for children which portrayed children as victims of Nazi atrocities. Instead of rejecting the characterization itself, the organization rejected it as the *only* characterization. The revitalization of the Young Pioneers' reputation was dependent on the image of the active, contributing, sacrificial child. While the child-as-victim paradigm was useful for motivational purposes and emotional appeal, it was too passive for the Pioneers' objective. The Pioneer organization needed to lead, not to mourn; it needed to cultivate agents, not objects.

Thus, the Komsomol leadership sanctioned several more versions of the Soviet child in its media: the hero-worker, the sacrificial hero, the Pioneer hero-patriot, the hero-warrior. In so doing, the organization expanded the image of the child exponentially. Rather than a flat, faceless, inert victim, the child was recognized as having the agency to create, to contribute, to memorialize, to sacrifice, to labor. Jeffrey Brooks argues that in the early years of the war, before the tide had turned and victory was more or less assured, state media such as *Pravda* conveyed “real” motivations – patriotism, anger, revenge, love of family, adventure – in individual accounts of war experiences, before the post-Stalingrad penchant of interpreting all positive actions as paeans to Stalin replaced such unmanageable, suspect sources of inspiration.⁵² The Pioneer organization shared none of this unease with its adult counterparts. These emotions worked in favor of the Young Pioneers because, based on decisions made in the fall of 1942, they had co-opted these emotions as legitimate for Pioneer children. Patriotism? Fantastic. Anger toward the enemy and the desire for revenge? Excellent. Love of family? Fine. Adventure and initiative? Super, as long as it’s directed toward contributing to the war. All of these qualities had been incorporated into the heroic exempla disseminated by Pioneer media. With this move, the Young Pioneers transformed a problem for their organization – the conditions of war – into a solution for their revival. Children were already responding to the war, in a

⁵² Jeffrey Brooks, “*Pravda* Goes to War,” in Stites, *Culture and Entertainment*, 14-16.

variety of ways; the Pioneers simply needed “an in” to this ad hoc children’s movement. By presenting qualities and characteristics children were already displaying as a result of the war as worthy of emulation and Pioneer-like, the organization could claim ownership and leadership of those qualities and characteristics. This more complex picture of the Soviet child during the Great Patriotic War, as expressed through the heroic narratives of the Pioneer organization, was a good bit closer to reality than the image presented in state propaganda for adults. Though it is not a complete representation – for obvious reasons, it ignores anything deemed negative or deviant – the Pioneer-supplied heroic archetypes are more dynamic and helpful for understanding the various roles the child was expected to play as well as those that children genuinely embraced.

Though this project is not about reception, there is at least preliminary evidence that much of this heroic idealization was internalized and adopted by Soviet children. As several former students of Moscow’s School No. 25 explained to historian Larry Holmes, “‘Propaganda gave meaning to our lives.’ . . . ‘We lived in a cult of the exceptional.’”⁵³ Accordingly, the rhetoric of the state was used regularly by children who wrote or contributed to Pioneer publications and organizations during the war. Without doubt, children voluntarily served

⁵³ Larry E. Holmes, “Part of History: The Oral Record and Moscow’s Model School,” *Slavic Review* 56, 2 (1997): 297. These former students, interviewed as adults, were reflecting on their student life in the 1930s, but agree that this genuine belief and inspiration they found in communism – and Stalin, to lesser or greater degrees – lasted until his death in 1953.

with partisan or Red Army forces. It has been suggested that postwar youth political opposition, critical of careerism and indifference in the Komsomol, expressed itself in the language and ideals of the Party⁵⁴ – a model of heroism and self-sacrifice first disseminated to children during the war. Even childhood memories of the war were influenced by the Party’s messages about proper heroism.⁵⁵

Whether or not these definitions of heroism were internalized by Soviet children, they reflect an expectation of behavior by the Soviet state. Heroes were to work, die, hate the enemy, and love the Party, all to save the motherland. Forced to confront the realities of war, children were expected to act as adults, sacrificing their childhood to the war effort – a childhood lost, both to war and to wartime policies of the Soviet state.

⁵⁴Juliane Fürst, “Prisoners of the Soviet Self? – Political Youth Opposition in Late Stalinism,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (2002), 353-375. Hiroaki Kuromiya criticized this article for its basis of evidence – transcripts of confessions he suggested were coerced - but even if coerced, the ideals propagated by the Party during the war provided the language and imagery, the “underground mythology” of the partisans expressed by the youth Fürst investigates. Kuromiya, “‘Political Youth Opposition in Late Stalinism’: Evidence and Conjecture,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (2003), 631-638.

⁵⁵Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, “Innocent Victims and Heroic Defenders: Children and the Siege of Leningrad,” in *Children and War*, 287-288. Kirschenbaum suggests that children of the Great Patriotic War often integrated official mythology with personal experiences in an attempt to find meaning in a wartime childhood. See also, Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2001), where she suggests that Party imagery and rhetoric provides a “prefabricated template of childhood memory” (166).

CHAPTER 6

WHAT DOES A PIONEER DO?: WARTIME TASKS FOR CHILDREN

*You tell every father at the front,
That we will take care of business here.
In the farm's field,
In the housekeeping,
Well, where we can be, we'll be. . .*

from "To Fathers, Going to the Front," V. Bil'chinskii, student, 1941¹

Above all else, in order to regain visibility and social currency, the Young Pioneers had to get active. For over a year, the organization had been almost mute about the role of children in conditions of war. In the fall of 1942, the Komsomol leadership of the Pioneers finally recognized the danger of this silence and took immediate steps to remedy it by unveiling a torrent of campaigns. Aside from one significant exception, the Pioneers did not introduce any new responsibilities to the children it was trying to reach. Children made contributions to the national cause throughout the course of the war, contributions that have been largely neglected in the story of the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War. The Pioneer organization, however, had to reassert itself as leader of and inspirer of all children's activities in order to take credit for them. Thus, the Pioneer organization dispatched a flurry of missives – via Pioneer media, detachment meetings, school curriculum, and so on – exhorting "Pioneers and

¹ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 3, l. 293. Broadcast on "Pioneer Dawn" on 22 November 1941.

schoolchildren” (“*pioneri i shkol’niki*”) to do what they were, in large part, already doing. Once the Young Pioneers endorsed children’s activities, all of the positive, constructive efforts of Soviet children could be claimed by the organization, whether or not the fiery rhetoric of the Pioneer pledge was the original motivation.

* * *

Agricultural work

Of all the tasks allotted to children, agricultural work was among the most important, and it is in this area that children made quite significant and underappreciated contributions to the Soviet effort. Pioneers were to be encouraged to participate in agricultural work not only because of the dire labor shortage, but also because of its importance for their upbringing (*vospitanie*).² Spurred on by slogans such as “Our work is our attack on the fascists!” (“*Nash trud – nash udar po fashistam!*”), Pioneers joined millions of Soviet citizens attempting to keep farms and factories running during the war. An average of five million Soviet children worked, each year, on collective and state farms, contributing over 760 million workdays (*trudodnei*) between 1941 and 1944.³

² TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 15, ll. 11-16.

³ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 94, l. 13-14. *Trudodnei* for 1941, 172,100,000; 1942, 148,798,784; 1943, 197,492,432; 1944, 242,310,678. Children working on farms in 1941,

While Sovnarkom and the Party's Central Committee had decreed that each twelve- to sixteen-year-old belonging to a *kolkhoz* (collective farm) family contribute a mandatory fifty workdays annually, it is evident from the figures and from anecdotal evidence that all sorts of Soviet children, urban and provincial, contributed far beyond this minimum requirement to agricultural work during the war. Various reports suggest that the majority of schoolchildren did some kind of agricultural work throughout the school year and during vacations, and the memoirs of those who were children during the war bear this out.⁴

The contribution of children to collective and state farm labor appears to have been quite significant. A report to the Central Committee in the winter of 1942-1943 claims that on some collective farms, children constituted as much as 70 percent of the agricultural workforce.⁵ In Moskovskaia oblast alone, children made up 30 percent of collective and state farm labor.⁶ In Irbitskii raion, Sverdlovskaia oblast', the Party's District Committee concluded that

1,550,600 (incomplete statistics); 1942, 4,765,107; 1943, 4,983,913; 1944, 5,858,698. Based on rough estimates of approximately 20 million children of Pioneer age, this means that at any given time in the war, approximately a quarter of children were reported as participating in agricultural work. A "workday" was measured in output. For example, if harvesting two puds of grain was considered a day's work, then a child who harvested 12 puds in one day would be able to record completion of six workdays.

⁴ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 17, l. 3. This report to the Central Committee on the summer/fall of 1942 suggests that up to ninety percent of students were participating in agricultural work, though, to be fair, the report lists numbers as low as sixty-six percent. On memoirs, see, for example, Goldberger, *Stalin's Little Guest*, 72; Hautzig, *The Endless Steppe*, 140; Winterton, *Eye-witness*, 11-12; Tobien, *Dancing*, 104.

⁵ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 15, l. 128-128 ob. While most examples given estimate children were responsible for 30 percent to 50 percent of agricultural labor, the report states that "the students of Noshinskaia School (Krasnoiarskii Krai) performed 70 percent of all the agricultural work in the collective farm 'Forepost'."

⁶ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 17, l. 7-8.

schoolchildren performed at least half of the most important agricultural tasks there.⁷ Incomplete statistics for 1941 suggest that workdays by children accounted for about 5.6 percent of the total Soviet agricultural output that year. The highest contribution was 8.3 percent of total output in the Bashkir ASSR and the lowest, 1.8 percent, in Uzbekistan; most reporting administrative units place the percentage of workdays attributable to children between six and eight percent.⁸ The number of children working on farms nearly quadrupled by 1944, so the implication is that children's output increased as well. Even by simply doubling output (which I think is extremely conservative), that would make children responsible for over 10 percent of output on collective and state farms in the Soviet Union during the war.

Agricultural work was done on collective farms, state farms, village communal plots, and urban gardens, and the jobs that children performed were varied and numerous. Most of the tasks fall under the category of physical labor. They range from chores that sound, frankly, like busy work to occupy little hands to duties essential to the functioning of the farm. Every year of the war, children harvested crops, transported manure and feed, aerated the soil, dug holes for food storage, collected ashes for use as fertilizer, cared for livestock, mowed, plowed, threshed wheat, baled hay, repaired fence and barn stalls, built granaries,

⁷ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 17, l. 7.

⁸ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 15, l. 123. Only twenty republics, regions, or provinces reported statistics for this report.

sharpened scythes, operated heavy equipment such as combines and tractors, sowed various crops, chased birds away, and destroyed mice.⁹ Less helpful, perhaps, but nonetheless “socially useful” work included educational work on the collective farm – conducting newspaper readings, putting on plays for farm workers, holding talent shows, and distributing edifying leaflets.¹⁰ While the Pioneers would argue that this work, too, contributed to Soviet productivity, it is obviously immeasurable and thus debatable.

Immediate, short-term needs for mass labor – such as harvest time – were addressed by the creation of national workdays called *voskresnika*. These weekend workdays were held throughout the war.¹¹ Well over two million Pioneers participated in the “Pioneer Front” Sunday-workday on December 22, 1942, chopping over 74 million cubic meters of firewood for schools and families of front soldiers, collecting over four million tons of scrap metal, gathering over two million puds of corn and two million tons of other vegetables, distributing fifty tons of bread, collecting 297 tons of coal, and clearing about thirty thousand cubic meters of snow.¹² These workdays were not without problems; a report

⁹ Astrakhantseva and Khorunzhii, *Po obe storony fronta*, ch. 1, 18-19; TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 26, l. 26; TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 15, l. 128; TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 15, l. 142; TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 17, l. 12 – which also notes, oddly, that children collected grain from mouse burrows to add to grain collection; *PP* “Summer on the Collective Farm,” 2 June 1943, No. 22 (2743), 3; *PP* “Schoolchildren Go to the Fields!” 9 June 1943, No. 23 (2744).

¹⁰ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 26, l. 52; TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 17, l. 10.

¹¹ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 13.

¹² TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 13, ll. 7-9. Activities and accomplishments listed above are only a partial list.

from Ivanovskoi oblast states that no workdays were held in five regions because no leaders were available to direct activities.¹³

Poor organization and coordination plagued agricultural work among children across the Soviet Union. Various district and oblast' personnel complained bitterly about collective farms unwilling to accept help or assign meaningful tasks, provide for meals or housing of child workers, provide equipment for children, distribute record books, norms, or payment to children, and about the lack of enthusiasm by school personnel in leading and overseeing the work. Children, too, could be less than enthusiastic about their tasks.¹⁴ This led to an effort by Komsomol Secretary N. Mikhailov to push through a Sovnarkom resolution forcing Narkompros and Narkomsovkolkhoz to more closely monitor the progress of and recognize the value of children's agricultural work.¹⁵ Accordingly, the People's Commissar of Agriculture (head of Narkomsovkolkhoz) recommended that Pioneers and schoolchildren spend, depending on age and type of work, between six and eight hours a day doing agricultural work, under proper supervision.¹⁶

¹³ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 13, ll. 21-22.

¹⁴ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 15, l. 129 ob., 131 ob.; RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 15, l. 28. In the same report to the CC, Komsomol secretary Mikhailov discusses many shortcomings in collective farm participation by children. In some instances, children were given no instructions or were given useless tasks to keep them out of the way. (see l. 37-38) In her memoir of experiences as a Polish exile in Russia, Janka Goldberger recalls being sent to a collective farm in Central Asia where "work" consisted of horseplay, napping, and occasionally hoeing weeds. See Goldberger, *Stalin's Little Guest*.

¹⁵ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 15, l. 17-21.

¹⁶ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 15, l. 40.

This signaled an enormous shift away from contemporary Soviet labor law. Even with a relaxing of the Soviet labor code in July 1940, youth ages fourteen to sixteen were officially permitted to work only four hours a day, and even that only with the permission from the Trade Union. Labor for children under fourteen was absolutely prohibited.¹⁷ A Supreme Soviet decree of October 1940 allowed collective farms to draft two boys fourteen to fifteen years old per hundred workers for four years of service; again, by implication, children under fourteen were deemed too young for this sort of work.¹⁸ The Young Pioneers never made a strong case for factory work among children – though certainly some children labored in homefront industries¹⁹ – but by 1942, the Komsomol leadership agreed that, despite the labor laws, agricultural labor was appropriate for all Pioneer-aged children and advocated it regularly. Students kept small copybooks in which they recorded the number of workdays (*trudodnei*) they completed. Contests were held which rewarded students, schools, and teacher-

¹⁷ Anglo-Soviet Youth Friendship Alliance, *Soviet Youth in Industry* (London: Anglo-Soviet Youth Friendship Alliance, 194?), 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9. The same decree provides terms and ages for Trade Schools (in metallurgy, chemicals, mining, and oil production), Railway Schools, and Factory Training Schools. The terms of service range from six months (the FTS) to two years. Minimum age for the Trade School and Railway School was fourteen while the minimum for the FTS was sixteen.

¹⁹ B. Sergeev, who was a fourteen-turning-fifteen-year-old boy during the war, recounts his experience as a laborer making Katyushas at the “Kompressor” factory in Moscow: “We were permitted to work four hours a day. But as I came in, I saw boys my age, all working on an equal basis with grown-ups . . . twelve-hour [shifts] . . . no heating. . . . Sometimes we did not go home at all and worked until we could no longer hold the spanner for fatigue.” “Voice of Russia,” at http://www.vor.ru/55/55_b/55b_eng.html#9, accessed March 2005 (Moscow: Voice of Russia, 2000). TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 14, ll. 1-4, states that 25,000 Pioneers took mechanics classes in order to learn to repair civilian machinery such as tractors or trucks. See GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 18, ll. 5-6 for an account of a Vologda girl who worked in a sewing factory.

leaders who contributed extraordinary amounts of work time in the fields.²⁰

Some children regularly worked in excess of their officially-permitted hours, one observer noting that some older children worked fifty-five to sixty hours a week.²¹

Soviet labor law, especially in the early years of the war, was quietly ignored, as the need for workers outstripped prewar concerns about education or child labor.

By the closing years of the war, the Young Pioneer organization was claiming the labor of children in agriculture as one of – if not *the* – most significant contributions of Soviet children to the home front.

Collect-o-mania

The collection of various useful materials was a task common to children in most, if not all, belligerent nations in World War II. Military needs, the vast numbers of people made homeless by evacuation or invasion, scarcity of supplies, all created the necessity for careful conservation and recycling of existing resources. Young Pioneers and schoolchildren were exhorted by the Komsomol leadership to collect a wide variety of items. As a job that even the youngest and

²⁰ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 17. Exemplary students might have participated in excess of 340 workdays (ll. 145-181) or exceeded the norm by 200 percent (l. 208). An example of a student copybook of workdays is included in TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, ll. 56-61. It records the daily journal of the 5th class of School Number 52 in Tula.

²¹ Fay Caller, *In Freedom's Cause: Soviet Youth at War* (New York: New Age Publishers, Inc., 1943), 13. Caller notes that this amount of work was against state regulations for child labor. At least one source suggests that summer holidays were extended by one month during the war (June 1 to October 1, instead of September 1), in order to allow schoolchildren to work a longer period of time. See Beatrice King, *Soviet Children in Wartime* (London: Russia Today Society, 1943), 12.

smallest of Pioneers could participate in and succeed in, it appears to have been incorporated into the daily life of most children.

Pioneers and schoolchildren were encouraged to collect recyclable materials, such as scrap metal and paper. This encouragement often took the form of a challenge issued by a particular school or Pioneer detachment. An open letter to all Pioneers daring them to collect paper – scraps, used copybooks, old newspapers and so on – reported that Moscow Girls' School Number 131 had collected two tons in the autumn of 1942.²² Scrap metal, according to the Pioneers, could be recycled into weapons and machinery, and children were urged to collect all they could find. Young Pioneers of Priomor' e pressed their fellow members to try and collect at least one hundred kilograms each.²³ In response, Pioneers of Stalingrad collected 11.5 tons of scrap metal in 1943, those in Novosibirsk, six *thousand* tons in 1942-1943.²⁴ One report asserts that Pioneers collected at least 134,000 tons of scrap metal during 1942, 1943, and 1944, an average of eighty kilograms per Pioneer.²⁵

To supplement the diet of front soldiers and provide them with home remedies considering the shortage of medicines, Pioneers were instructed to spend between three and four hours each day collecting medicinal plants, berries,

²² TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, ll. 111-112. Other examples can be found in PP, "Mission Accomplished," 4 August 1943, No. 31 (2752), and

²³ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, l. 9.

²⁴ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 62, ll. 57, 103.

²⁵ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 103, l. 14.

mushrooms, and the like.²⁶ Dogrose, willow bark, chamomile, sorrel, nettles, berries of various sorts, root of valerian, pine needles to fight vitamin C deficiency, dried mushrooms to supplement soldiers' diet when meat was scarce – all could be put to use healing or feeding soldiers at the frontlines. Children were told that one hundred kilograms of dried mushrooms could replace the meat of an entire cow or eight sheep, and urged on by energetic ditties such as, “Summer and camp are waiting ahead./Don't just walk through the woods in summer-/Bring home/Many healing herbs./Healing juice of these woodland herbs/Is needed for the wounded and sick.”²⁷ Soldiers could be healed by drinking “a wonderful magic drink” made from wild rose.²⁸ Regular features in *Pionerskaia Pravda*, *Pioner*, and *Murzilka* informed children which herbs or plants were ready to be collected.²⁹

Model collectors were publicly lauded in the Pioneers' newspaper and on the radio. Moscow School No. 318 was commended for collecting almost 40,000 kilograms of wild plants at summer camps they organized. In one year, children

²⁶ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 67, ll. 175-178.

²⁷ GA RF f-6903, op. 16, d. 3, 188; GA RF f-6903, op. 16, d. 3, l. 508. TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 67, l. 175-178, explains additional ways to help children understand how they were contributing by collecting plants in a series of mathematical formulas. A kilogram of dogrose equaled a daily of vitamin C for eight hundred soldiers; a kilogram of tree bark could make two shoes, while five kilos could make a saddle for a horse.

²⁸ GA RF f-6903, op. 16, d. 3, l. 505.

²⁹ See, for example, *PP*, “What to Collect in August,” 4 August 1943, No. 31 (2752). The series is called “Calendar: Gathering Wild Plants” (“Kalendar: sbora dikorastyschikh”); “K mnogomillionnoi armii nashikh malen'kikh pomoshchnikov,” *Murzilka* 3-4 (March-April 1942), 19.

collected almost 15,000 kilograms, or 275 kilograms each.³⁰ Once Pioneer camps reopened, collection of medicinal and edible plants was part of the daily agenda for campers.³¹ Though Pioneers were admonished for only preparing 105 tons, or fourteen percent of the projected plan, in the first six months of 1943, by the end of the war, more than 241,000 tons of wild plants had been gathered and prepared for shipment to the front by Pioneers.³² Soviet children were responsible for almost 78 percent of the total amount of medicinal and supplemental plants collected during the years of the war.³³

The Pioneers began vigorously advocating the collection of items for those less fortunate as well. Items might include clothing, books, school equipment, comestibles, and cloth bandages, while recipients could be orphans, wounded soldiers, the children of Leningrad, or hospital patients.³⁴ Special emphasis was placed on gifts for the military. Pioneers created and collected small presents that were sent to soldiers on the front. A decree of the Komsomol's Central Committee requested that each soldier receive a tobacco pouch and handkerchief handmade by Pioneers. The Novosibirsk oblast reported sending 500,000 tobacco

³⁰ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, l. 12.

³¹ See, for example, *Leninskoe Znamia*, 22 July 1944, in N. M. Kuz'mina and N. K. Tin'kova, *Ot pervikh kostrov pionerskikh: iz istorii pionerskoi organizatsii Karelii dokumenty i materialy* (Petrozavodsk: "Karelia", 1984), 348, and TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, l. 11.

³² TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 64, ll. 1, 7.

³³ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, l. 13.

³⁴ See, for example, *Moldavskaia SSR v godi BOB, Sbornik dokumentov i materialov v dvykh romakh T. 1* (Kishinev, 1975), in V. M. Kovalchik, et.al., ed., *Strana leningradu*, 348.

pouches to the front.³⁵ Pioneers of Iaroslavl made handkerchiefs embroidered with phrases such as “to the dear soldiers,” “to protector of the motherland,” or “to the great front soldier.”³⁶ Sometimes Pioneers sent packages of gifts to the front, each one including handkerchiefs, tobacco pouches, neckcloths, cigarette-holders, envelopes and writing paper, or socks.³⁷ Often, these gifts were sent in honor of a holiday such as the anniversary of the October Revolution, the anniversary of the founding of the Red Army, or May Day.³⁸ Samples of these gifts, often unevenly yet touchingly embroidered with dedications, are on display today in the Great Patriotic War museum in Moscow’s Victory Park.

Finally, Pioneers actively collected money for the construction of tanks, airplanes, armored cars, and other military vehicles, as well as for the national defense fund and the national children’s fund. Often, monies collected were designated for tank columns or airplanes named after the children or region that gathered it. For example, Kirghiz Pioneers collected 130,200 rubles for the tank dubbed “Pioneer Kirghiz.”³⁹ Pioneers collected millions and millions of rubles nationwide; individual Pioneers often challenged others to follow their

³⁵ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 117.

³⁶ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 12, l. 48.

³⁷ See, for example, TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 62, ll. 2-3.

³⁸ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 67, l. 195.

³⁹ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 14, l. 20. Other examples include the tank “Saratov Pioneer” funded by Pioneers from Saratov (f. 1, op. 7, d. 14, l. 46), tank column “Young Pioneer” (f. 1, op. 7, d. 14, ll.43-44), and airplane “Soviet Student” (f. 1, op. 7, d. 14, l. 39). More examples include *PP*, 7 April 1943, No. 14 (2735), 1,

example.⁴⁰ In the town of Kislovsk, Pioneers collected forty thousand rubles for military vehicles, but one fifth grade Pioneer turned in 7,200 rubles for a plane and 1,000 rubles to build a ship.⁴¹ Pioneer Tamara Frolova's gift of seven thousand rubles for the tank column "Young Pioneer," sent to Stalin personally in a letter, inspired several copycat gifts and letters to Stalin.⁴² Challenges and contests may have been effective: Pioneers of the Gorki oblast alone collected four million rubles for the construction of a tank column.⁴³

Timurovtsy

We are not a gang of roughs

Nor a rabble band.

We are disciplined and tough

And our pranks are planned.

Pioneers all are we!

Pioneers are we!⁴⁴

⁴⁰ It is unclear from whom Pioneers collected these donations, even when individual accounts are available. Emphasis is placed on the Pioneer who collected and the amount collected, but not on the identity of the donor(s).

⁴¹ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, ll. 114-120.

⁴² TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 14, l. 25. Stalin's response to Frolova – a brief thanks on behalf of the entire Soviet nation and army, is on l. 26. Other letters and monetary gifts to the army include Tanya Chenulaev's nine thousand rubles (f. 1, op. 7., d. 14, ll. 27-28) and Galya Gorestova's eight thousand rubles (f. 1, op. 7, d. 13, l. 28).

⁴³ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 13, l. 20.

⁴⁴ Arkady Gaidar, *Selected Stories*, trans. Yevgeny Shukayev (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973).

The *timurovtsy* (timurites), Pioneers and children who decided to emulate Arkady Gaidar's popular, fictional hero, Timur, by taking care of the families of soldiers sent to the front emerged spontaneously early in the war. In squads or teams of as few as three and as many as twenty, these timurites stepped in to fill the shoes of absent husbands, fathers, and brothers, clearing yards, chopping wood, gathering fuel, babysitting young children, fetching water, cleaning streets, shoveling snow, and so on. One such squad received a citation from the regional soviet for taking care of 293 families.⁴⁵ In School Number 22 in Arkhangel'sk, fifty-three Pioneers cared for 350 families of front soldiers.⁴⁶ A letter to *Pionerskaia Pravda* praised a timurite squad for its work in a Kuibyshev hospital. There, Vera Krontovskaia's troop of eighteen Pioneers allegedly worked in the kitchen and laundry of the hospital, sang songs and wrote letters for the wounded, collected money for books for patients, and collected items of clothing for evacuated children.⁴⁷ Initially, there had been some concern about the *timurovtsy*, as in some cases, their troops and activities had apparently been pitted against those of the Young Pioneers.⁴⁸ By 1943, however, the Pioneer organization had adopted the timurite movement as one of its own creation and design. The work

⁴⁵ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 12, l. 36.

⁴⁶ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 61, ll. 62-63.

⁴⁷ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 12, l. 27.; see also, TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 61, ll. 64-66, for another description of timurite hospital work from Morshanska in the Tambov oblast. In addition to the tasks listed above, these Pioneers held concerts, read to the wounded, collected pencils and quills for the wounded to write letters, and organized a library for the patients. List 65 includes a thank you letter from the hospital to the timurite squad.

⁴⁸ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 52.

of the very first Timur team – intentionally presented as a group of Young Pioneer boys and girls – and its adult sponsor, nicknamed “Baba Shura,” became part of the organization’s lore during the war, as the story was recounted in print and in song.⁴⁹

Grave-tending

In July of 1944, the Komsomol Central Committee received a secret letter from the Deputy Directors of the Central Urban Public Amenities Authority of Narkomsovkolkhoz and the military’s Casualty Data Collection Authority. Military cemeteries, it noted, were being neglected, and individual graves of soldiers unmarked and uncared for. These authorities gave Komsomoltsy and Young Pioneers the duty of tending the graves of soldiers or sailors who were killed in action or died of injuries at a hospital, to memorialize those in the military who perished in the war. This new job for youth and children was twofold: first, they were “to assist in compiling exact data on the numbers of graves of privates, sergeants, and officers,” and second, they were to “place a grave marker over each grave, inscribed with an error-free, indelible inscription that include[d] military rank, last name, first name, patronymic, year of birth, and date of interment.”⁵⁰ It decreed “continuous care” for the graves of soldiers,

⁴⁹ See, for example, TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 61, ll. 77-78.

⁵⁰ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 94, l. 34.

sailors, and partisans, as the proper, grateful response of youth and children to those who sacrificed their lives defending Soviet freedom.

The Red Pathfinders, as they were later known, were tasked with both an administrative role, in recording fatalities, and a civic role, as they memorialized the sites of military burials. The number of military casualties was certainly a sensitive matter for the state. Soviet media used nebulous, collective phrases such as “heavy losses” or simply omitted quantifying casualties altogether when describing military actions. Admitting, even in a small way, that Soviet deaths were so numerous and widespread that it was beyond the state’s capabilities to tend to them properly was quite a concession to reality.

That the state would hand over this job to youth and children is thought-provoking. The secrecy with which this task was handled is indicated by the remarkable absence of its existence in contemporary, self-promoting reports about Pioneer activities during the war. Because their activities were not recognized or popularized until years later, at least one scholar mistakenly asserts that the Pathfinders were not founded until the mid-1960s.⁵¹ Later Pioneer publications gloss over the specifics of the original purpose, innocuously defining a Red Pathfinder as “a Pioneer who studies the revolutionary, military and labor history of our people, Party, Komsomol, and his own organization.”⁵²

⁵¹ Friedrich Kuebart, “The Political Socialization of Schoolchildren,” in Jim Riordan, ed., *Soviet Youth Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 106.

⁵² Furin, *The World of Young Pioneers*, 109.

What accounts for this? Historian Catherine Merridale suggests that in the immediate aftermath of the Great Patriotic War, the state (she claims Stalin himself) was initially reluctant to encourage popular remembrance of the war because “the memory of fighting could be personally liberating, and that made it dangerous.”⁵³ The state could influence memory, but it could not entirely control it or the associations it threatened to arouse. As time passed and impressionable memories became more susceptible to the state’s version of events, the commemoration of the war became a state-endorsed national pastime. Giving this task to youth and children might have been a method of instilling gratitude, patriotism, and nationalism in the rising generation; it may also have been considered the best, most efficient way to delegate responsibility for a delicate, sensitive task the state preferred to hush up.

Pioneer-Partisans

As demonstrated by Juliane Fürst, Soviet partisan (or underground) activity was given publicity and press coverage disproportionate to its frequency among youth.⁵⁴ To be sure, partisan activity occurred behind German lines from 1941 until the end of the war. The Soviet state, however, had mixed feelings about such potentially autonomous groups. Begrudgingly, the state eventually

⁵³ Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia* (NY: Penguin Books, 2000), 213-214.

⁵⁴ Fürst, “Prisoners of the Soviet Self?,” 365.

sanctioned partisan actions, recognizing their value as part of the Soviet military effort and as public morale boosters. Though not exactly a Pioneer dictate, children were encouraged to idolize and, if possible, emulate the actions of Pioneer-partisans.

The number of Pioneers working with partisan groups seems to have been quite small, but their accomplishments drew a great deal of attention in Young Pioneer media. Underground Pioneer organizations, working closely with partisan groups, were identified in Russia, Ukraine, and the Baltics.⁵⁵ Pioneers in Pokrovskoe, a village in Ukraine, created a secret meeting site in a cave, devised a secret code corresponding to the Ukrainian alphabet, and worked with local partisans, transporting arms and weapons, distributing messages, and cutting German communication lines.⁵⁶ The Pokrovskoe group was the subject of much attention within the Pioneer organization. An intensive interview with these Pioneers and regional secretary L. G. Melnikov provided the material for numerous stories disseminated to children.⁵⁷ Most commonly, Pioneers were lauded for service as scouts or spies for partisan troops, but occasionally, one finds incredible stories of individual bravery recounted. One Pioneer, fourteen-

⁵⁵ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 53, d. 306; see also, Kudinov, "Obshchestvenno dvizheniia," 172; *PP*, "Yunie partizani" 14 April 1943, No. 15 (2736), ; *PP*, "Partizanskii Mai," 1 May 1943, No. 17 (2738); *PP* "They Saved Partisans," 26 May 1943, No. 21 (2752).

⁵⁶ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 53, d. 306, ll. 92-93. The *delo* contains press clippings from various newspapers, including *Pionerskaia Pravda*, which relate the story of the Karovskii Pioneers.

⁵⁷ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 53, d. 306, ll. 65-77. Letters of recommendation (*kharakteristika*) for each of the twelve Pioneers in the underground movement are found in TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 53, d. 306, ll. 78-89.

year-old Zhenia Zemliakov, held off Germans for two hours by throwing grenades, providing time for Soviet soldiers to reposition and attack.⁵⁸ Another group of Pioneers, eleven and twelve-year-olds Vladimir Sharapanin, Ivan Treskov, Anatolii Smirnov, and Petr Marin, under cover of night, dug up and stole the mines laid by Germans to blow up a bridge used by the partisans, thus saving the partisans and running the Germans out of their village.⁵⁹ In all, over 200,000 Pioneers received awards and medals for defense of the motherland, including twenty thousand for the defense of Moscow and more than fifteen thousand for the defense of Leningrad. Six Pioneers, all partisans, were posthumously named Heroes of the Soviet Union.⁶⁰

The Pioneer leadership romanticized the lives and acts of children who joined the partisans, tapping into a preexisting desire among some children to “do something” for their nation. Too young to officially enlist, too old to embrace obliviousness, stirred by anti-German propaganda, some Pioneer-age children yearned to contribute to the war militarily.⁶¹ By publicizing and heroizing

⁵⁸ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 62, l. 57.

⁵⁹ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 32, d. 95, ll. 60-61.

⁶⁰ Kudinov, “Obshchestvenno dvizhenie,” 172.

⁶¹ Scores of letters from children testify to this longing. One letter, from Tonya Savelieva to her regional military recruiting office, states: “I am a Pioneer; I am fourteen years old. I am asking you to enlist me into the people’s militia. Together with the Soviet people I will be defending our Motherland, which guarantees us a happy childhood.” Another example, from Gennady Mezhevalov of Berezovskaia middle school to the Komsomol regional headquarters: “November 10, 1942. I am fourteen years old, but I am asking you very seriously to send me to defend our dear City of Stalin [Stalingrad]. I want to become a spy. I give my word to beat the enemy to my very last drop of blood. G. Mezhevalov. Mother approves.” *Istoria VLKSM i pionerskoi organizatsii imeni V. I. Lenina* (Moskva, 1978), 216, in Kuz’mina and Orlov, *Ot*

partisan activity, the organization validated these feelings among children, officially resolved any question about partisan acceptability, and allowed millions of other children to live vicariously through the few who did engage in partisan activity.

*Pioneer- “Otlichniki”*⁶²

In principle, being a good student had always been a requirement for Pioneer membership. The war, however, had seriously disrupted regular schooling, both in occupied territory and in areas not threatened by conflict. Shortages of faculty and materials plagued the education system. Students attended school in morning and afternoon half-day shifts, school years were often abbreviated, and some school days were scrapped altogether in favor of agricultural labor. Absentee parents could not enforce school attendance. For some, daily struggles to survive diminished the importance of studying. The number of children in school dropped precipitously. Despite these difficulties – or more likely, because of them – the Pioneer leadership pressed children to apply themselves to their studies, to study hard, and to make excellent grades. Performing well in school had been a well-rehearsed theme in Pioneer media for years. Once Soviet fortunes in the war turned, though, the demands of rebuilding

pervykh kostrov pionerskikh, 66; and TsKhDMO f. 7, op. 1, d. 87, l. 1, in Astrakhtseva and Khorunzhii, *Po obe storony fronta*, ch. 1, 42.

⁶² The top mark in the Soviet educational system was a “5” or an “excellent” (*otlichno*). What we would call “straight-A students” were called “*otlichniki*” in the Soviet Union.

the Soviet Union and the need for an educated population necessitated a return to normalcy in education. Thus, the frequency and intensity of the messages emphasizing the importance of doing good work in school escalated after 1943.

Schoolwork, however, had to be made significant in the war effort. How could it compete with the physical activities like collective farm labor, partisan aid, and scrap metal collecting that seemed so relevant to the war effort? The Pioneer leadership's solution was twofold: first, they invoked the names of heroes and soldiers in promoting the importance of study, and second, the content of schoolwork (and organizational work) itself was changed to more accurately reflect the national context.

Pioneer media presented outstanding school work as an appropriate, grateful response to the war by children. Via "Pioneer Dawn," Major-General Miasnikov advised children that, "The best New Year's gift for your fathers and brothers at the front will be your honorable success in school," and President of the Academy of Sciences, Dr. Komarov intoned, "Right now, your fathers and brothers, heroes of the Red Army, are fighting for your happiness. . . . Be worthy of their efforts. Study hard, so that you can grow up to be educated and brave, honest people, worthy of your great Motherland."⁶³ Receiving excellent grades in school established a connection with the most popular of Pioneer heroes, Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya. An article in *Pionerskaia Pravda*, just before final exams,

⁶³ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 18, l. 1-2.

entreats children to “Study Like Zoya!” and reproduces Zoya’s own certificate of completion. In the same issue, two-time Hero of the Soviet Union A. I. Molodchevo informs children that succeeding in school “is the best thing you can do to help the front.”⁶⁴ Veterans of selected schools, such as Moscow (Boys) School No. 110, gave testimonies about their roles in the war, so that current students would begin to see themselves as part of a larger school-wide legacy.⁶⁵ A poem by a fifth-grader about a younger brother’s first day of primary school includes the memory of an older brother – “now . . . a soldier” – who had attended the very same school.⁶⁶ *Murzilka* published a poem entitled, “Two *Otlichniki*” which compared the efforts of a young student diligently studying his math, Russian, and geography with the brave acts of a frontline soldier, his father: “I take after you, father:/We are both otlichniki./You are a Red Army soldier,/My war is my studies.”⁶⁷ The underlying principle of the organization’s promotion was that even the most mundane of children’s activities could be injected with new enthusiasm if it were connected to the war. Armed with slogans such as “Knowledge is strength” and “Knowledge is as important as a rifle in battle,” the

⁶⁴ *PP*, “Study Like Zoya!” 19 May 1943, No. 20 (2741), 1; *PP*, “I Wish You Success,” 19 May 1943, No. 20 (2741), 1.

⁶⁵ *PP*, “We are from the 110th,” 21 December 1943, No. 51 (2772). The article includes a drawing of soldiers and a handful of civilian men marching under a school banner.

⁶⁶ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 43, l. 4. Broadcast 2 September 1944. The poem is by Tsezar Solodar. The stanza indicated is “Here’s the front of a big building - /I am very familiar with everything around here./ My older brother went to school here - / Now he is a soldier.”

⁶⁷ “Dva otlichnika,” S. Marshak, *Murzilka* 8-9 (August-September 1944), 2. The text of the first stanza, translated above (my translation), is “Ia ves’ v tebiia poshel, otets;/Otlichniki my oba./Ty – Krasnoi Armii boets,/Moia voina – ucheba.”

Pioneers' leaders set out to elevate the prestige and significance of studying and schoolwork.⁶⁸

By decree from the Central Committee of the Komsomol, the war was introduced into all school subjects, including literature, physics, and geography.⁶⁹ Features in *Pionerskaia Pravda* emphasized the importance of being able to read a map properly, of reading about Russian heroes such as Kutuzov or Aleksandr Nevskii, and of appreciating the Russian language more fully.⁷⁰ All these educational lessons, however, were given war aims. Children needed to be able to read a map to more fully understand news from the front and to hone their survival skills, when life might depend on deciphering topographical features. History, in general, focused on the defense of Russia against foreign aggressors and the heroes, popular actions, and military men who had achieved it.⁷¹ Nevskii, in particular, resonated with the Soviet public, as his successful battle against the Teutonic Knights was recounted in a myriad of ways. Observing English lessons

⁶⁸ *Klassnye rukovoditeli o svoei raboty s komsomoltsami i pionerami* (Moskva: 1955), 11, in Kassof, *The Soviet Youth Program*, 93-95.

⁶⁹ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 10, l. 18. John Dunstan, *Soviet Schooling during the Second World War*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1997), describes this process in detail.

⁷⁰ See, for example, *PP*, "Don't Forget the Map," 7 April 1943, No. 14 (2735), *PP*, "Three Great Commanders," 21 April 1943, No. 16 (2737), and *PP*, "The Great Russian Language," 26 May 1943, No. 21 (2742).

⁷¹ Kuebart, "Political Socialization," in Riordan, *Soviet Youth Culture*, 105.

in Tbilisi during the war, journalist Margaret Wettlin noted that the vocabulary for the day included the terms “tank,” “pilot,” and “gunner.”⁷²

More insistently, however, authorities urged that children’s play, especially that in the Pioneer organization, revolve around war-preparedness. The Central Committee asserted that war-preparedness training should occur at least two times a week for at least two hours, with an emphasis on wartime roles Pioneers might be expected to play, such as spies, messengers, firemen, and drivers, along with massive political work against fascism.⁷³ Physical training was a very important part of this war-preparedness. Each Pioneer was encouraged to do exercises and wash with cold water each morning to toughen the body.⁷⁴ Pioneer media urged children to practice martial skills. In one broadcast, for example, the “Pioneer Dawn” narrator suggested they organize grenade-throwing contests in their Pioneer links, in order to develop lobbing accuracy whether standing or prone.⁷⁵ The radio program advertised a book on camouflaging people and vehicles by a Major Palkevich that it encouraged children to read and utilize, to learn how to become invisible and get close to the enemy unnoticed.⁷⁶ Accurate marksmanship was a particularly prized skill. This

⁷² Margaret Wettlin, *Russian Road: Three Years of War in Russia as Lived Through by an American Woman* (London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1945), 41. She continues: “When it was over, the children were using these words in their own sentences, about their own brothers.”

⁷³ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 67, ll. 156-157.

⁷⁴ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 67, l. 195.

⁷⁵ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, op. 9, ll. 332-333. The story concludes with a little slogan: “Pioneer!/Show your skills./Be able to throw a grenade well.”

⁷⁶ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 18, l. 6-7.

training was to be integrated into children's daily routines, so that it became a normal part of school and Pioneer activities. Children's school carnivals could include skiing competitions; holiday festivities provided the reason for shooting competitions and tactical war games between students.⁷⁷ In the description of Moscow's 1st Lesnaya School's New Year's celebration, Grandfather Frost appears, and indicates that the "best shooters will receive gifts first."⁷⁸

Organized games suggested for Pioneers pitted two teams against each other in role-playing games such as "Whites and Reds," "Workers and the Slacker," or "Bolsheviks and Mensheviks," more often than the previous decades, which tended toward cooperative games.⁷⁹ Other contests were meant to teach practical martial skills. The game "Spy," for example, was designed to develop children's orientation and stealth. One team played the role of a resting division in the forest, while the objective of the other team was to surround them while remaining hidden and on the lookout for enemies.⁸⁰ Another game, "Listen to the Commander's Order!," is a sort of "Simon Says"-like game designed to teach "children to pay attention and follow orders quickly." One of the Pioneers is to shout various commands at his troop – "Forward – march," "Air raid!," "Tanks!" – at which the other Pioneers were to perform specific actions, such as marching

⁷⁷ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 32, l. 5-6. 2 January 1944. The examples occurred in Barnaul and in Khabarovsk.

⁷⁸ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 47, l. 5. 2 January 1945.

⁷⁹ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 67, ll. 8-9.

⁸⁰ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 67, l. 208.

or hiding in the nearest ditch.⁸¹ Role-playing games invented during the war such as “Zoya and Shura” and “The Young Guardsmen” reflected figures made famous by the Pioneers and remained popular for years after the war was over.⁸²

* * *

This is far from an exhaustive list of the tasks and responsibilities appointed for children during the war, but it gives a picture of some of the major areas in which the Pioneers’ leaders attempted to mobilize children for the war effort. In addition to those described in detail, Pioneers were expected to be self-sufficient at home, mending, babysitting, cleaning, repairing, or stretching scarce resources, and at school, cleaning up, making repairs, storing fuel, making up the Pioneer room, and maintaining the physical education area.⁸³ Visiting hospitals to read to or write letters for soldiers and spending time at children’s homes playing with orphans were also commonly endorsed activities, especially for younger Pioneers.⁸⁴

⁸¹ “Stroeveye igry,” M. Cherevko, *Pioner* 11 (November 1942), 32.

⁸² Thorez, *Model Children*, 21. Thorez notes that these games were still played by Pioneers in the 1950s.

⁸³ See children’s instructional booklet at TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, ll. 67-72; TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 67, l. 195.

⁸⁴ See, for example, the double-page illustration in *Murzilka* 2-3 (February-March 1943), 8-9.

As the Communist Party's mouthpiece among children, the Young Pioneer organization is uniquely qualified to illuminate state aspirations. The vast array of duties that the Young Pioneer organization promoted provides insight into the state's expectations for children in this war. In combination with the qualities explored in the previous chapter, a portrait of the Soviet state's ideal child in the years of the Great Patriotic War begins to emerge. This child actively contributed to the homefront in a wide variety of ways and, when called upon, willingly and heroically sacrificed life and limb, inspired by a passionate patriotism, hatred for the enemy, and loyalty to the red scarf he or she wore as a member of the Young Pioneers.

But the intensive campaign of responsibilities launched by the Pioneer organization had an ulterior goal beyond that of defining state expectations for children. The Komsomol perceived that the Young Pioneers were at a critical juncture in their existence. Without drastic action, the organization was in danger of being another casualty of the war. The revival of the Young Pioneers appeared dependent upon increasing the visibility, the relevance, and the presence of children in Soviet society. The tasks assigned to children by the Pioneers were intended, as a whole, to both accomplish these aims and reestablish the leadership role of the Young Pioneers among Soviet children. Their public espousal of such a wide variety of tasks – assignments which, frankly, must have covered every child in the Soviet Union – allowed them to claim leadership and take credit for

the children's accomplishments. Everything from harvesting grain to collecting rosehips to babysitting to doing homework became war work. All war work, once publicly supported by the Pioneers, became Party property.

What must be reiterated, however, is that, with the exception of the Red Pathfinders movement, the Pioneers did not invent the duties they commissioned. Neither did they initiate them. Children did. Based on reports sent to Moscow and anecdotal evidence from memoirs and children's communications, these activities emerged spontaneously, as children reacted to the war and its peculiar set of problems and issues.

As early as July 1941, a trickle of reports began arriving from various parts of the Soviet Union addressed to the Komsomol Central Committee, describing the efforts of Pioneers and schoolchildren in response to the war. Activities recounted include agricultural labor on collective and state farms, factory work, collection of scrap metal and plants, collection of funds for the defense fund, Timur teams to care for soldiers' families, aid to soldiers and partisans, physical training, working at hospitals, manufacture of gifts for soldiers, and doing well in school – all of the major campaigns that the Pioneers would “launch” in the fall of 1942.⁸⁵ Children's play, unprompted, reflected the

⁸⁵ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 24, l. 220; RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 25, l. 85-86; RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 28; RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 32, l. 15, 30-36; Partiinogo arkhiva Karel'skogo obkoma Kommunistichikh partii sovetiskikh soiuz (hereafter cited as PAKO KPSS) f. 1229, op. 3, d. 169, ll. 20-21, PAKO KPSS f. 218, op. 1, d. 213, l. 99, PAKO KPSS f. 8, op. 12, d. 135, l. 128, PAKO KPSS f. 642, op. 16, d. 111, l. 11, PAKO KPSS f. 213, op. 1, d. 266, l. 266, PAKO

national context. Witnesses in Leningrad found children playing games such as “stretcher bearer” (pointing out that “our wounded don’t cry [like] theirs”) and “Red Army versus the Fascist Dogs.”⁸⁶ Wettlin noted that as early as the summer of 1941, children played army constantly, turning everyday objects into tanks, planes, and grenades.⁸⁷ Without direction from the center, teachers recognized and reported children’s emotional reactions to characterizations of the enemy. In the fall of 1941, one instructor from Siberia wrote “Pioneer Dawn” to report that her students’ “eyes light up with such hatred and anger when one reads to them about animal acts of fascists. The hated Hitler dared to take away our freedom, our bright and happy life.”⁸⁸ These sorts of lessons – “lessons that stimulated the will to live” in the midst of death – were used from the beginning of the war in schools.⁸⁹ Though the reports are relatively few in number compared to the hundreds of reports about children’s activities which the Central Committee received beginning in late 1942, the content of these reports and of early

KPSS f. 1229, op. 3, d. 386, l. 23, in Kuz’mina and Tin’kova, *Ot pervykh kostrov pionerskikh*, 65-66; Tsentralnyi i gosudarstvennyi arkhiv istoriko-politicheskikh dokumnetov Sankt-Peterburga (TsGAIPD SPB) f. K-598, op. 5, d. 2, l. 18, and *Amurskaia oblast’ v B.O.B. 1941-1945. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Blagoveshchenski: 1976), 173-174, in Koval’chik, et. al, *Strana Leningradu*, 54; *PP* 5 July 1941, 3, in Astrakhantseva, *Po obe storoni fronta*, ch. 1, 18-19; TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 77, d. 108, l. 26, in Astrakhantseva, *Po obe storoni fronta*, ch. 2, 65-66.

⁸⁶ Skomorovsky and Morris, *The Siege of Leningrad*, 44, 50. The authors relate a morbid, but amusing anecdote. While watching children play “Red Army vs. the Fascist Dogs,” one child protested having to play the role of “fascist dog.” His consolation? He agreed to play the fascist dog, but only if he could be a dead fascist rather than a live one.

⁸⁷ Wettlin, *Russian Road*, 8.

⁸⁸ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 2, l. 188(3) (24 October 1941)

⁸⁹ Interview with Natal’ia Borisovna Rogova, in Simmons and Perlina, *Writing the Siege*,

anecdotal evidence is significant for it demonstrates the localized, spontaneous nature of children's initiatives and mind-set in absence of centralized directives.

Further, these reports suggest that the Young Pioneers made a significant shift in tactics during the war. For decades, the Pioneers could best be described as a prescriptive organization: the organization used decrees, heroic narrative, media, and propaganda to tell Soviet children how to behave and what values to espouse. Changes in Pioneer messages for children reflected socio-political events from above, not grassroots movements from below. In the first eighteen months of the Great Patriotic War, however, the Pioneers appeared paralyzed. In an effort to save a floundering movement and inject life into a moribund organization, the Young Pioneers needed no-fail, popular campaigns that would immediately produce returns. Rather than "reinventing the wheel," so to speak, the organization followed the lead of Soviet children. Caught in this unique and uncomfortable situation, the Pioneer organization prescribed very little that children were not already doing or already idealizing. For the first time in its history, the Pioneers became a descriptive organization rather than a prescriptive organization. This shift was the mark of an organization desperate to revive its reputation. Placing its fortunes in the hands of its own members, the Young Pioneers hoped to regain its position at the forefront of children's activities.

CHAPTER 7
BECOMING THE VANGUARD:
THE RESURRECTION OF THE YOUNG PIONEERS

“ . . . the Young Leninists, the children of the Soviet people, who dearly love the Motherland, perform heroic deeds, study, work, and help their fathers and brothers in the struggle against the enemy.”
“Young Pioneers,” 1944¹

The revival of the Young Pioneer organization and the rescue of its reputation commenced with the recognition of the crisis in late 1942. For the last three years of the war, the organization used directives and media at its disposal in a clandestine attempt to regain its leadership position, however illusory, among Soviet children. While the orders themselves were public and widely-disseminated, the motivation for them was not. According to reports and telegrams received, the response from the provincial and local level was immediate, which had to be gratifying for the Komsomol members responsible for the welfare of the Pioneer organization. To increase the prestige and visibility of the Young Pioneers, the organization identified and publicly lauded child heroes for their actions during the war. The creation of summative documents reporting the contributions of children – under the leadership of the Young Pioneers, of

¹ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 103, l. 86. This is a handbook for Pioneer leaders which provides a brief history of the Young Pioneers, a summary of the role of Pioneers in the Great Patriotic War, and details about the internal structure of the organization.

course – to the victorious war effort began in early 1944 and continued throughout the duration of the war. Later Soviet literature adopted this official version of Pioneer leadership in the Great Patriotic War activities, with slight modifications, and incorporated it into the state-approved narrative.

This reassertion of the Young Pioneers into the mix, however, was not without its difficulties. Some regions of the Soviet Union were reluctant or merely unable to cooperate with the dictates of the Party and lagged behind in implementing the measures handed down by the Komsomol leadership. Membership in the Pioneer organization increased over the course of the war, though not nearly as quickly as the organization might have hoped. Conditions of war impeded the full application and execution of Pioneer plans to self-promote, and internal struggles over approaches and strategies continued after the war's conclusion in 1945. Though the extent of these complications demonstrates the superficiality of the organization's "recovery," the Young Pioneers accumulated enough response to and support of their programs to credibly claim leadership of Soviet children and their contributions to the war. With this, their place in the war narrative was assured, as was the organization's future.

* * *

Local responses to Young Pioneer directives

Initially, the reports which reached Moscow were not promising. Various cities, provinces, and regions complained of Pioneer leader shortages, inactive Pioneer troops, lack of resources, apathetic teachers and principals, disruption caused by the war, and a general dearth of knowledge about and enthusiasm for Young Pioneer activities.² These were all the problems the Komsomol identified as contributing factors in the decline of the Pioneer organization at their meeting in the fall of 1942. The accounts appeared to confirm what the Pioneer leadership had feared was happening to the Pioneer movement across the nation.

A particularly acerbic report came in from Kuibyshev. After complaining of a vast array of problems – from detachments which “exist only on paper” to pathetic, boring Pioneer meetings to children with “mental problems” who faked activities to report – the account concluded, “It is impossible to say anything about the work of Pioneer headquarters, only because they exist neither at the Komsomol obkom nor at the gorkom, while those that formally exist at some raikoms do nothing.”³ The brutal honesty of the Kuibyshev report may well have

² See TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, ll. 38-53 (from Kuibyshev), TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, ll. 107-107 ob. (from Kursk), TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, ll. 122-124 (from Penza), and TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, ll. 125-126 (from Riazan’).

³ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 53. Apparently this report was a bit too direct; a handwritten note on the top of it indicates that the report’s writer, A. Gol’din, was to be fired and replaced. Gol’din, (assuming it is the same A. Gol’din) however, resurfaces as the secretary of the Komsomol in Leningrad in a report he submitted in 1944 (RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 94, ll. 38-49). Experienced Pioneer leaders were few; it might be assumed that Gol’din was removed from his position as Kuibyshev oblast’ secretary and transferred to the Leningrad city committee, rather than being terminated from service altogether.

cost the author his job, but other reports were similarly troubling, if more diplomatic in tone. The Kursk Pioneer director complained of Pioneer raion committees formed but non-functional.⁴ Riazan' and Penza both complained of indifferent Komsomol leadership and poor training of Pioneer leaders.⁵ Even in the capital city of Moscow, Pioneer leader shortages were endemic, thus, very little had been done beyond discussing responses to the Komsomol's 1942 resolution, "Major Shortcomings in the Work of the Pioneer Organization and Measures to be Taken to Rectify These Shortcomings."⁶

In January 1943, the Komsomol Central Committee's Department for Schools and Pioneers fired off an eight-page "informational note" to all of the oblast, krai, and republic Komsomol Central Committees. With scarcely-concealed annoyance, the report listed, in rapid-fire, terse statements, four pages of accomplishments – "Over five hundred people were present at the Pioneer members meeting in the city of Chita," "Over four hundred Pioneers took part in a ski parade in the city of Molotov," "Poets and composers in Georgia are working on a Pioneer march" – and then proceeded to pack four more pages with scathing criticism of "extremely slow and unsatisfactory" efforts among Pioneer leaders to carry out the wishes of the Komsomol.⁷ Four primary deficiencies were identified: Pioneer leaders were not being adequately recruited and trained,

⁴ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 107 ob.

⁵ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 122, 125.

⁶ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, l. 64.

⁷ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 9, ll. 89-91.

content of Pioneer link and troop activities was uninteresting and deficient, Pioneer Palaces were nonfunctional, and schools were not adequately supportive of Pioneer activities. To ensure clarity of intention and address some of the concerns expressed, the Komsomol distributed a point-by-point instructional document for Young Pioneer headquarters that enumerated responsibilities and described organizational procedures for Pioneer leadership at the district, city, regional, and provincial levels.⁸

Though many of the “measures” handed down by the Komsomol to improve the Pioneer organization were aimed at raising interest among children, all of the shortcomings and failures of the organization’s strategies were blamed on leadership. To fault children for insufficient interest or enthusiasm would be fatal; it would indicate that the organization had been damaged beyond repair. Impugning the leadership was the easier way out. The primary reason for the failure of the Komsomol’s directives, according to the Komsomol, was that the tactics had not been properly communicated or completely implemented. The problem lay with the messenger, not with the message.

Despite any setbacks, however, by mid-1943 activities among children in local Pioneer troops and detachments began to pick up, ostensibly inspired by

⁸ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 86, ll. 1-7. The statement, dated 9 December 1944, begins with ideas as fundamental as “The headquarters staff consists of seven to ten people” and “The headquarters should carry out the tasks related to directing the work of Pioneers. . . .” The perception that some Pioneer leadership would be ignorant of such basic information must have been distressing to the Komsomol!

orders from the Young Pioneers. Beginning with the all-important “Measures” memo in the fall of 1942, the Pioneers issued directives about reviving camp attendance among children, collection of medicinal plants, collective farm work for schoolchildren, the collection of gifts for soldiers, the collection of scrap metal, other recyclable materials, and money – often introducing national competitions and prizes for high-achieving children and Pioneer troops – and *Pionerskaia Pravda* sponsored a literary contest and arts competition to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Red Army.⁹

Responses to Moscow in the form of official reports began as early as the winter of 1942 and continued throughout subsequent years. Leningrad recounted that 15,354 Pioneers were active in 626 timurite squads, caring for over a thousand families of soldiers and injured veterans by doing chores such as cleaning apartments or courtyards and providing fuel for heaters.¹⁰ In addition, Pioneers gave over a thousand concerts at hospitals, collected over fifteen thousand gifts for soldiers, and made hundreds of pairs of socks and underwear for wounded soldiers.¹¹ Magnitogorsk testified about the excellent work of a particular timurite team led by eleven-year-old Pioneer Oleg Koppa. Members of this team, which grew from twenty-five to one hundred fifty children, not only did odd jobs for families of soldiers, but led the Cheliabinsk oblast’ Pioneers in

⁹ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 67, ll. 1, 17-20, 23-34, 170-171, 175-181; TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 62, ll. 1, 37-43; TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 64, l. 5, 21-34.

¹⁰ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, ll. 36-37.

¹¹Ibid.

collection of medicinal plants (over seven thousand kilos), collection of money for the construction of the “Cheliabinsk Pioneer” tank, and collection of scrap metal (nearly seven thousand kilos). Koppa’s Pioneers cleaned their schoolrooms, repaired maps and other supplies, and took care of orchards surrounding their school.¹² Tula oblast’ submitted a report which detailed contributions by Pioneers via agricultural work, collection of tons of wild plants and scrap metal, numerous activities of timurite squads, and exceptional schoolwork – both physical and academic. The account alleged that over two million Pioneers and schoolchildren had produced over eleven million workdays in agriculture labor, and then went on to note outstanding individual or Pioneer troop achievements in other tasks.¹³ Formal reports such as these emphasize the “Pioneer-ness” of young activists far more than earlier accounts, and it seems clear that the volume of reported endeavors increased dramatically after 1942. Whether the amount of activity multiplied due to Young Pioneer influence is debatable – it could be due to the fact that Soviet fortunes in the war were gradually improving, allowing children the opportunity to contribute – but this was immaterial for the purposes of the Pioneer organization. If the *aktiv* became active, the Pioneers could take credit.

Official reports provided one means of judging the success of Young Pioneer initiatives. Another measure involved individual accounts from Pioneers

¹² TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, ll. 53-54.

¹³ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 103, ll. 14-19.

themselves. In 1942, the radio program “Pioneer Dawn” made a concerted effort to encourage children to write in and share the ways in which they were helping the Soviet war effort. Appropriate testimonials could then be reproduced in various forms of Pioneer media and utilized in composing official reports of children’s activities. Most letters are fairly short and relay basic information such as the child’s name, age, location, contribution or story, and greeting. Fifth-grader Rita Portiuk of School No. 54 in Alma-Ata informed Moscow that her fellow students had collected more than sixteen tons of scrap metal, donated 777 pieces of clothing for evacuated children, and promised to study well to earn only high marks.¹⁴ Writing from a children’s home, Nina Korobova explained the efforts of her fellow evacuees to be self-reliant – cleaning, mending, chopping firewood, doing repairs – in order to reduce the need for state resources. She concludes, “Now we consider it the most severe punishment if they don’t allow us all to go to work. No one wants to sit here without work during time of war”¹⁵ Fifth-grader Tolya Komlev wrote in to boast about the prodigious amount of workdays recorded in his workbook after summer vacation.¹⁶ Misha Vasiliev and Vova Rodin confided that they were studying topography and guns, practicing

¹⁴ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 14, ll. 10a-11a.

¹⁵ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 9, l. 507-508.

¹⁶ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 43, l. 16.

auto repair, learning German, and rubbing snow on their bodies to prepare for future combat against “the hated enemy.”¹⁷

The wording of such correspondence is significant. Another sign that the Young Pioneers might well have pointed to as an indication of the organization’s revival among children was the increasing use of Pioneer-connected language by children themselves. Even if disingenuous or ignorantly chosen, the internalization and repetition of particular phrases and concepts common to Soviet propaganda was useful to the Young Pioneers. It allowed the organization to claim ownership of the letter, its author, and its contents – of anything, in short, which could be valuable to the Pioneers.

Certainly, children appear to have mastered the nationalist war rhetoric encouraged by the state; numerous letters from Young Pioneers use phrases such as “kill the fascist dogs,” “the Soviet Pioneers will not be traitors!” and “avenge us, defenders of our Soviet Motherland!”¹⁸ Other letters parrot the directives issued by the Pioneers. In a telegram, fourth grade students from School No. 14 in Makhach-Kala wrote, “We applaud the initiative of Pioneer Aplodova who donated her savings to the building of a new tank named ‘Young Pioneer.’ In our class, we collected five hundred rubles. We will donate this money to the tank-

¹⁷ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 9, ll. 4-5.

¹⁸ See, for example, TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 32, d. 95, l. 235; TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 32, d. 95, ll. 249-255; TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 14, l. 25.

building fund. We call upon all Pioneers to follow our example.”¹⁹ These students were probably nine or ten years old – this formal, stilted speech echoes the Pioneer organization rather than reflecting the genuine language of children. Geras’kin, the welder-student described above, began his letter with the slightly condescending statement, “You are wrong, children, if you think that it is impossible to study and to work at the same time.”²⁰

It is reasonable to assume that some of these dispatches were manufactured by the Young Pioneers to illustrate certain values or to encourage particular activities. There is evidence, however, outside the Pioneer organization of the resonance of Pioneer-sponsored themes and language amongst children. Readers of *Pioner* and *Murzilka* sent in drawings, some of which were published in the magazines. The children’s artwork all reflects the war’s influence. Whereas illustrations in early 1941 depict folk characters such as the Golden Cockerel or rural landscapes of homes, trees, horses, and wagons, later reader-submitted artwork features tanks, explosions, enemy aircraft, or historic Russian warriors.²¹ Writer Vera Inber served as a judge in a children’s literary competition in May of 1943 and recorded the subjects of the winners in her *Leningrad Diary*. The winning entry among fourth graders depicted the German

¹⁹ GA RF f. R-6903, op., 16, d. 3, l. 16.18.4.

²⁰ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 18, l. 1.

²¹ See, for examples of prewar artwork, *Murzilka* 3 (March 1941), 12, 18; for examples during the war, see *Murzilka* 3-4 (March-April 1942), 15; *Murzilka* 2-3 (February-March 1943), 13; *Pioner* 10 (October 1942), 50.

invasion in this way: “They were marching into towns/ Looting shops without distinction/ Drinking vodka, taking fat/ Smashing tins and gulping quickly.”²² A Pioneer submitted a story, “The First Bomb,” about the experiences of a girl who carries casualties to the hospital and tends to wounded people after an air raid. The winning entry among ninth graders was entitled “What Work on a State Farm has Given Me.”²³ In another instance of state-speak, a letter sent to Viacheslav Molotov from an orphanage in the Crimea begins,

The enemy brought much destruction to our country and left us parentless. Our fathers died in battle and our mothers were killed in bombing raids or tortured to death by the German monsters. Our mother is now our beloved Motherland, and our first and most loved father is you and also Comrade Stalin. Therefore, let us begin our letter with our greetings and thanks to you and to Comrade Stalin for your gentle care, which you give to us even when you are working on nationwide issues, when you are directing the course of battles against the enemy.²⁴

The Komsomol leadership’s hunch that children would respond to war-related rhetoric seems to have been correct. Whether intentionally or unintentionally,

²² Inber, *Leningrad Diary*, 147.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ GA RF f. P-5446, op. 70, d. 15, l. 80, in Livshin and Orlov, *Sovetskaia povsednevnost’*, 147.

they borrowed the language the state transmitted via the Pioneer organization to express themselves.

Summer camps held special significance for the Young Pioneers and served as many children's fondest memories of their membership in the organization, so their reopening was critical to the Pioneers' resurgence. Despite the fact that the war continued, Pioneer camps began reopening in 1943. In many places, such as Moscow, Tula, Kalinin, Leningrad, Rostov, Smolensk, Murmansk, Kursk, and Orlov oblasts, camps had closed due to wartime conditions and lack of resources.²⁵ Though some camps never closed during the war years, those that remained open were tremendously scaled back in resources and number of campers. Budgets for camps were slashed from 270 million rubles in 1940 to 40 million rubles in 1942.²⁶ Because of the budget cuts, camps were cost-prohibitive for many Pioneers. Though Profsoiuz arranged for some children of wounded or killed soldiers to attend camp for free, most parents were expected to pay half of the four hundred ruble cost for twenty-one days of camp, a sum that would be roughly equivalent to a year's tuition in secondary school.²⁷ Even so,

²⁵ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 67, ll. 170-171.

²⁶ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 22, ll. 4-5. A variant figure of 105 million rubles for 1942 is reported in TsA VLKSM f. 1, op. 1, d. 264, ll. 15-16, in V. I. Nikolaev, *Pionerskaia organizatsiia v gody velikoi otechestvennoi voiny (1941-1945 gg.)* 11 i 12 lektsii spetskursa "Istoriia Vsesoiuznoi pionerskoi organizatsii imeni V. I. Lenina" vysshaia Komsomolskaia shkola pri TsK VLKSM – kafedra pionerskoi raboty (Moskva: 1973), 46.

²⁷ *PP*, 19 May 1943 No. 26 (2741), p. 4, indicates that ten percent of campers were attending free compliments of Profsoiuz. Profsoiuz, the Trade Union organization, for reasons that are not entirely clear, was responsible for Pioneer camp oversight and funding. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 22, l. 23, calculates the cost of one camper for a twenty-one day session at about four

approximately 382,000 children attended Pioneer camp in the summer of 1942 and 465,000 in the following summer.²⁸ By 1947, the situation returned to normal; more than two million children, or about 25 percent of those eligible, spent the summer in Pioneer camp. The budget for Pioneer camps received a boost of 1.11 trillion rubles, an amount appropriate to the accommodation of so many more campers.²⁹ Often, war work occupied a significant part of the daily schedule of children at Pioneer camp. While camps included crafts, concerts, games, and sports, they also contained time designated for war-preparedness training, physical education, and other tasks, even after the war was over.

Pioneer Heroes

Another means of signaling the resurgence of the Pioneers involved publicizing selected hero-children closely associated with the organization. Depending on their stories, these Pioneer-heroes could serve as proof that the Young Pioneers had been playing an active role in the war since its inception.

hundred rubles. To make up for budget cuts, the Central Committee proposed that parents pay half the cost. To put this in perspective, John Scott, in *Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia's City of Steel*, gives a figure of two hundred rubles for a year's tuition in 1940 for schooling above seventh grade. His research indicates that an average worker earned about three hundred rubles a month. Scott, *Behind the Urals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 214, 242.

²⁸ TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 22, ll. 9-17, for the 1942 stats; TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 7, d. 61, ll. 28-36, for the 1943 stats. Nikolaev, *Pionerskaia organizatsiia v gody*, gives the following figures for campers: 1942: 300,000; 1943: 405,335; 1944: 730,000; 1945: 269,613, based on TsA VLKSM f. 1, op. 1, d. 264, ll. 15-16. No camper statistics were found for 1941. It would be particularly interesting to know how many children were at camp – and where – in the summer of '41, considering the timing of the invasion of the Soviet Union.

²⁹ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 189, l. 28.

Individual or collective heroes were useful in a variety of ways. The values demonstrated by heroes illustrated characteristics the Pioneer organization wished its members to adopt. The heroes carried out missions or tasks endorsed by the organization. And, these heroes were always Pioneers or former Pioneers.

The two former-Pioneer-heroes most often mentioned in the Pioneer press were Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya and Liza Chaikina. These two teenage girls fought or aided partisans in the war and died at the hands of the Germans. Both girls were canonized early in the war and their names and examples were invoked repeatedly in Pioneer media and in children's letters. In 1943, sixth-grader Zoya Kirilova wrote in, "I learned to hate the enemy. I often tell my mother: 'Mother, if I were a grown-up and could fight in the war, I would follow the example of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya. I would do the same she did: be tortured but not give up my Motherland, you, mother, my sisters and brothers. I would rather die myself than let the Motherland die.'"³⁰ Other Pioneers list presentations on or poetry about Liza Chaikina as part of troop meetings.³¹ On the first day of the school year in 1944, "Pioneer Dawn" described Moscow School No. 210, Kosmodemyanskaya's former school: "Here is a big, well-lit room where she studied, here's the library where she was a frequent visitor. Her most favorite books are arranged in the corner. . . . Zoya took care of some trees here [in the

³⁰ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 18, l. 5.

³¹ GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 18, l. 5.

school garden].”³² Kosmodemyanskaya’s portrait hung on the wall of the school accompanied by a painting of Chaikina that “girls studied well.”³³ They were the perfect combinations of warrior, student, and product of Young Pioneer upbringing. The two could inspire children to appropriate emotions and actions as well as solidify the influence of the Pioneer organization.

The other child-heroes who played an enormous role in Pioneer media during the war were the Karovski Union of Pioneers. This group of twelve Pioneers, ages eleven to sixteen, was organized by fifteen-year-old Vasilii Nosakov in Pokrovskoe (village), Artemovskii region, Ukraine, in May 1942.³⁴ The self-styled Karovski Union was an underground Pioneer organization in occupied territory that supplied local partisans with small amounts of weapons and ammunition, wrote and distributed anti-German leaflets, cut enemy communication lines, hid some youth from the Germans, and took care of wounded soldiers. In the stenographic account of an interview by obkom secretary L. G. Melnikov with all but one member of the Karovski Pioneers, the children sound alternately heroic and ridiculous. Pioneer Lager, for example, alleged to have replaced a German officer’s revolver with a wooden revolver

³² GA RF f. R-6903, op. 16, d. 43, l. 5.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 53, d. 306. This entire delo is dedicated to the Karovski Pioneers and includes a descriptive, stenographic account of interviews, *characteristika* for each member of the group, and newspaper clippings about them. The twelve members of the Karovski Union of Pioneers were Vasilii Nosakov, Boris Metelev, Anatolii Prokopenko, Vladimir Lager, Elena Nikyлина, Nadezhda Gordienko, Olga and Anatolii Tzigankova, Varvara Kovaleva, Nina and Anatolii Pogrebniak, and Vladimir Maruzhenko. Metelev and Prokopenko were old enough by 1943 to join the army and did so.

while it hung, on a gun belt, on the rail of the officer's bed. Possible, but not probable. More realistically, he also claimed that he had stolen a revolver from a friend's house after the friend had bragged about owning it. Nosakov maintained that he had dressed up like a gendarme in order to arrest a drunken policeman who had angered him by staying at his house too long.³⁵ One *Pionerka*, in particular, risked her mother's physical abuse to remain active in the group.³⁶ This group remained active until September 1943, when the area was liberated by the Red Army. The youth asserted that, aside from two that joined the Red Army, each of the members of the K.U.P. had gone on to perform excellently in school, work productively on the collective farm, and become members of the Komsomol.

The Young Pioneers publicly praised the actions of the Karovski Union on the radio and in the press. Individual testimonies about their identities, families, deeds, and suitability as role models were collected from their hometown.³⁷ Their photographs ran in a June 1944 issue of *Pionerskaia Pravda*, along with a reproduction of the secret code they had created and a sample leaflet they had penned. The brief text portion that is quoted exclaims,

³⁵ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 53, d. 306, ll. 71-72.

³⁶ TsKh DMO f. 1, op. 53, d. 306, l. 74.

³⁷ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 53, d. 306, ll. 78-89.

Get up and defend your dear Motherland! We know that they [Red Army soldiers] can kill the enemy on the front only from one side, but we can kill him here from all sides. So let's fight to help free those who have been taken into captivity by the Germans. They are suffering there and they are there against their will. Comrades, let's start helping our great Red Army. Get up and fight the enemy! Death to the Germans! K. U. P.³⁸

Again, these are the hero-archetypes the Young Pioneers could exploit with enthusiasm. They demonstrated initiative within boundaries, intense patriotism, military-like discipline, disdain for the enemy, partisan activities, and Party identification.

A decade after the war's end, in 1955, the Central Committee of the Communist Party formally added eleven individuals and three groups of Pioneers to the Book of Honor of the V.I. Lenin Pioneer Organization. As Komsomoltsy, Kosmodemyanskaya and Chaikina were too old to be named Pioneer heroes, but all twelve of the Karovski Union of Pioneers were inducted, collectively, into the Book of Honor for their aid to partisans during the Great Patriotic War. The other two groups – the Pioneer troop “Friend” from Kharkov and an underground Pioneer organization in Karpovtsi – and the other nine individuals associated with

³⁸ *PP*, 27 June 1944, 1.

the war – Lyonya Golikov, Volodya Dubinin, Valya Kotik, Vitya Korobkov, Marat Kazei, Kolya Zverev, Volodya Pavlov, Vitya Khomenko, and Shura Kober – are mysteries, as far as wartime Pioneer media and internal organizational documents are concerned. Though several of these names are legendary Pioneer heroes of the war (Kazei, Kotik, and Golikov, in particular), they were apparently not lauded as heroes during the war. Either their brave acts were discovered after the war had ended or their identities and deeds were manipulated in the wake of the war for specific purposes. All of these individuals were being honored posthumously, having died or been executed during the war, so none lived on to contradict the state’s interpretation of their alleged actions. Though these particular children were not honored in Pioneer media during the war, the types of actions for which they were named heroes – aid to partisan troops by spying on or fighting the Germans – were common refrains in the organization’s press. Partisan activity was the closest children could get to the frontlines; it was romantic, it was adventurous. Whatever the hero’s name, whatever the deed, that child and his or her actions were useful to and could be coopted by the Pioneer organization.

Obstacles to Pioneer Revival

Practical considerations provided a series of obstacles to the Pioneers’ attempt to revive and reassert their organization’s public persona. Lack of

adequate facilities or equipment prevented Pioneer troops from meeting or doing activities. Poor coordination between teachers and Pioneer leaders led to conflict or indifference about Pioneer meetings and events. Hooliganism was reported in some Pioneer troops and detachments. Limited resources even made the external trappings of Pioneer organization – badges, flags, banners, and red scarves – scarce commodities. Pioneer leader shortages and deficiencies plagued the organization well beyond the end of the war.³⁹ School absenteeism was so rampant during the war that new, tougher measures to combat children’s crime were issued by the Sovnarkom beginning in June 1943 and the federal Public Prosecutor was granted unlimited authority to compel school attendance, in an effort to return children to the classroom.⁴⁰ As the Pioneer organization was tied to the school, attendance was of utmost importance. No students – no Young Pioneers. Practically speaking, the war immensely complicated the efforts of the Pioneer organization to function with any sort of normalcy or routine.

Internally, debates continued over the methods by which the Young Pioneers operated. Suggestions had been put forth at the fall 1942 meeting concerning the revision of or reimagining of the organizational structure within the Pioneers, but had not been adopted by Komsomol chief N. A. Mikhailov. Instead, Mikhailov recommended the reintroduction of existing infrastructure,

³⁹ See, for examples, RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 156, ll. 50-53, 61-62, 205. These are 1946 reports from Moscow, Samarkand, and Dnepropetrovsk.

⁴⁰ GA RF f. 9401, op. 12, d. 210, l. 6-6a; King, *Russia Goes to School*, 27.

reeducation about the existing principles of work among children, and training based on existing ideas about what the Pioneer organization entailed. Little had been done to effect institutional change. The modifications, rather, had been in emphasis and in tone. The 1942 reforms were cosmetic changes designed to bolster the popularity of a flagging organization among its target audience.

A classified report to the secretaries of the Communist Party's Central Committee (including Mikhailov), authored by someone only identified as L. Voinova, vehemently attacked the structure, pedagogical philosophy, and activities of the Young Pioneers as a poorly-disguised plagiarism of the Boy Scouts organization.⁴¹ Referring to specific page numbers and section headings, she claimed that some parts of the *Handbook of Pioneers' Leaders* were lifted word-for-word from 1942 American Boy Scout manuals. The same Pioneer handbook had even adopted various activities of the Boy Scouts *in toto*, making them "Soviet" by simply renaming them. The "Scouts' Walk" became the "Pioneers' Walk;" the "Scouts' stick" transformed into the "Pioneers' walking cane."⁴² Modern Pioneer literature was "full of completely non-ideological, so-called 'military games,' with the propaganda of numerous Scout 'badges' . . . with bothersome borrowing of 'the Scouts techniques' to implement in the Pioneers' organization."⁴³ The ranking system of the Scouts, whereby boys progressed

⁴¹ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 189, ll. 92-104.

⁴² RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 189, l. 100.

⁴³ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 189, l. 99.

from one level to the next after fulfilling requirements, had no place in the Pioneer organization, Voinova warned, as it smacked of bourgeois influence. She criticized the lack of “deep theoretical and methodological work concerning questions of organization structure.”⁴⁴ Existing Pioneer literature did not discuss either the content, the role, or the meaning of “the collective” among children. The organization ignored the theories and practical applications of influential Soviet pedagogue Anton Makarenko’s ideas on the communist upbringing of children. Young Pioneer leadership refused to engage in self-criticism or to introspectively consider whether or not Boy Scout influence was present within the organization, preferring the ease of adoption to the difficulties of innovation.

The threat of Scouting influence within the Young Pioneers was a serious accusation to raise, as the organization had been fighting the charge (and with good reason) since its inception two decades earlier.⁴⁵ Thus, affairs within the Pioneer organization were troubled by lingering doubts about the efficiency of institutional practices and pedagogy. Added to this were regular complaints from across the Soviet Union about the quality and quantity of Pioneer leadership at the local level. Fortunately for the Pioneers, these concerns remained confined to the upper echelons of the organization and appear not to have affected the public perception of the organization.

⁴⁴ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 189, ll. 100-102.

⁴⁵ See Chapter Two for more details.

Membership

Incomplete and inconsistent reporting, poor communication, and the German occupation make Young Pioneer membership figures during the war difficult to ascertain with precision. Pre-war membership, assessed in 1939, stood at approximately thirteen million.⁴⁶ Predictably, membership appears to have fallen off dramatically in the early years of the war. (See Table 1) The Pioneer leadership worried about the invisibility of the Young Pioneers in the early years of the war. If membership figures are any indicator, they were correct to be concerned. Only a fraction of eligible children were identified with the red-scarfed Pioneers. Even after the big push for revival in the Pioneer organization in the fall of 1942, growth was far from explosive. By the end of the war, however, most of reporting entities claimed that a majority of eligible children were members of the Young Pioneers. Several years after the war's conclusion, in 1948, the organization had still not yet recovered its prewar numbers, though this standard appeared within reach. Official membership did, indeed, reach the pre-war benchmark by May of 1949 with a reported total membership of thirteen million children.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ This is the figure given by official Komsomol census in Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, Appendix H. In an unsubstantiated archival document, Pioneer membership is listed as follows: 1939 – 12,611,906; 1940 – 13,973,481; 1941 – 13,694,560; 1942 – 4,219,739; 1943 – 4,425,236. These numbers indicate that the “official” figure of thirteen million is slightly high, but that by the eve of war in 1940, almost fourteen million children were members of the Young Pioneers. Since there are no documents to support the figures in this report, I have not included them in the membership chart and calculations.

⁴⁷ Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, Appendix H.

After the initial, precipitous decline in membership, the organization's numbers rebounded steadily, although, it should be noted, so do the number of reports; membership figures *ought* to have grown as more administrative units reported in. Most likely, all of these totals are incomplete, either due to difficulties caused by a mobile wartime population, poor conditions for coordination of statistics, or fear of reprisals for low membership totals. Even incomplete, however, they are far below what the Pioneer organization could be comfortable reporting during or after the war. Such a dramatic decrease in membership would have made the Pioneer's internal crisis public knowledge, and that was hardly desirable.

In fact, membership figures are conspicuously absent in all reports and draft-reports about the contributions of Pioneers and schoolchildren to the war. Aside from anecdotal uses of figures, such as something like "eight Pioneers from School No. 3 in Moscow cleaned the Pioneer room on their own initiative," nowhere do Young Pioneer membership totals make an appearance in Soviet public documents or in Pioneer media. The omission of precise figures did not hurt the organization's case as leader of Soviet children; rather, the absence of figures allowed the Pioneers to imply a sort of universal membership (hence the ubiquitous phrase "Pioneers and schoolchildren") as they recounted the role of children in the war.

Table 1: Pioneer Membership, 1942-1948

Reporting Period	Number of Reports (from republics, autonomous regions, oblasts, or cities)	Total Number of Pioneers Reported	Change from Previous Report
1942 ⁴⁸	28	2,231,329	- 10,768,671
1943 ⁴⁹	37	3,188,239	+956,910
April 1, 1944 ⁵⁰	51	4,175,680	+987,441
October 1, 1944 ⁵¹	63	5,103,757	+928,077
Oct. 1945-April 1946 ⁵²	55	5,443,976	+340,219
April 1946-Oct. 1946 ⁵³	82	8,081,123	+2,637,147
Oct. 1946-April 1947 ⁵⁴	105	10,670,116	+2,588,993
April 1947-Oct. 1947 ⁵⁵	85	9,812,885	-857,231
Oct. 1947-April 1948 ⁵⁶	82	11,226,567	+1,413,682

⁴⁸ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 41. All of the totals listed for the war years were calculated by adding the total number of Pioneers submitted by each city, district, region, or oblast; each was reported on a separate telegram or memo. Typically, these telegrams/memos included number of schools, number of detachments, total Pioneers, total elementary school children, total female Pioneers, urban Pioneers, rural Pioneers, and Pioneers in children's homes.

⁴⁹ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 76.

⁵⁰ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 103. No reporting period is given in this collection of statistics. The title of the file is "Pioneer membership as of 1 April 1944".

⁵¹ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 104. Reporting "period" is similar to previous report. A separate 1944 report (TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 103, l. 80) – unsupported by reports and only broken down by "urban" and "rural" categories – claims 7,042,731 Pioneers in the Soviet Union. This document, however, simply lists a total; it is unclear how many reports were included and how the figure was calculated. In any event, the total is far less than the 1945 report, so the veracity of this unsubstantiated total is questionable.

⁵² TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 152.

⁵³ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 154-155.

⁵⁴ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 175-177.

⁵⁵ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 178-179. It should be noted that ll. 84 and 85 include totals of reports. The total number of Pioneers provided is 10,109,913, but the telegrams/memos/reports in this file only add up to the figure listed above (9,812,885). Either way, the number decreases from the prior six month reporting period.

⁵⁶ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 206-207.

Summative reports

As early as 1943, the Pioneer organization began drafting summative documents detailing the role of children in the war. These comprehensive reports provided the framework for what would later become the official story of the Young Pioneers in the Great Patriotic War. The statements follow a similar format – introduction and inspiration, a cataloging of tasks and accomplishments interspersed with moving anecdotes, and a brief conclusion which reiterates themes of the first section. Extant notes and outlines list achievements of children to be included in formal written reports.

The introductions of various summative accounts attempted, briefly, to convey the significance of children to the Soviet war effort. One report begins, “During the harsh days of war, Soviet children showed that they are growing up to be real patriots and that they are ready to overcome any obstacles for the sake of the motherland, willing to sacrifice even their own lives.”⁵⁷ And another:

The victorious glory of our people will shine on eternally through the centuries. History knows no other examples of widespread heroism and utterly selfless dedication of the kind displayed by the Soviet people in the Patriotic War against the fascist invaders. . . .Adults are not the only ones inspired to do great deeds by their utter devotion and loyalty to the Soviet

⁵⁷ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, l. 7.

Motherland; these feelings also kindle a fire in the hearts of children.

Many beautiful pages in the chronicle of the Great Patriotic War will be dedicated to children.⁵⁸

The introductions were intended to remind the reader that children belonged in the enormous collective category, the “Soviet people.” In addition, the motivations for children’s deeds were revealed up front. Children were inspired by the same things adults were: patriotism, love of the Motherland, civic duty, other heroic and selfless acts. One report went on to credit, rather heavy-handedly, the Soviet school and the Pioneer organization for raising such hard-working, altruistic, young patriots.⁵⁹

The body of the typical cumulative document was comprised of an exhaustive list and lengthy description of children’s activities, accomplishments, and contributions to the war. Reports painstakingly described every task from agricultural work to collections to partisan aid to timber work to studying to factory work to gifts for soldiers to hospital work (and more), illustrating them with examples of overachieving Pioneer troops, schools, or individuals. Over seventy different pursuits were listed as having been fulfilled in some capacity by children. Though most achievements were described in terms of isolated figures

⁵⁸ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, l. 15.

⁵⁹ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, l. 16-17. Similar sentiments appear in various reports in f. 1, op. 7, d. 109, d. 110, and d. 111.

(i.e., “Georgian Pioneer Shura Sanaya harvested one hundred twenty kilograms of tea leaves in one day, fulfilling 1200 percent of the norm”⁶⁰), there was an attempt to begin to assess and quantify how significant children’s work was. Over the course of three years, one report asserted, children collected 240,780 tons of wild plants useful to the war. This collection effort represented 77.6 percent of the total collection throughout the Soviet Union.⁶¹ An outline noted totals of workdays – over 340 million – accumulated by children over the course of two years of labor on collective and state farms, while a more formally written report added a third year of labor to that figure, bringing total number of workdays by children to more than 585 million.⁶²

Written reports were lavishly padded with anecdotal evidence and children’s own words to more fully prove good intentions and heroic acts. Kuibyshev oblast earned over ten thousand rubles for the Defense Fund.⁶³ Masha Rubina was an outstanding tractor driver.⁶⁴ Pavel Fedotov of Trade School No. 3 in Sverdlovskaiia oblast wrote, “When I imagine how the shells made from our steel fly toward the Germans, I am filled with pride for my difficult and honorable occupation, and I don’t want to leave the plant when my shift is over.”⁶⁵

Lenochka Azarenkova, whose parents died at the front, donated one hundred ten

⁶⁰ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, l. 29; f. 1, op. 7, d. 108, l. 6.

⁶¹ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, l. 13.

⁶² TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 108, l. 9; f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, l. 13.

⁶³ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 108, l. 12.

⁶⁴ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, l. 28.

⁶⁵ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, l. 31.

rubles, all her savings, which her grandmother had given to her as a New Year's gift.⁶⁶ Some stories, such as the Kostya Kravchuk account and the Misha Davydov affair, appeared repeatedly. Kravchuk, awarded the Order of the Red Banner in 1944, kept Red Army combat banners safe in occupied territory for two years.⁶⁷ Davydov cut German communication lines with a knife. When he was captured, he was tortured and questioned about his commander. Davydov reportedly said, "All right, I'll tell you. Stalin told me to do it."⁶⁸

Within a decade of the war's conclusion, these accounts of children's contributions began to coalesce around some definite themes. Future narratives about children in the Great Patriotic War overwhelmingly emphasized two ideas: that education was a top priority among children during the war, and that Pioneers were intimately involved in all activities concerning the war, especially individually heroic acts. Though the slogan had been issued that "the most important war task of children is to study well," it was in the aftermath of the war that this task was most heavily stressed. Not that this responsibility had been neglected during the war; it had not. Reports after late 1942 regularly included updates on students' grades, numbers of students held back, and the enthusiasm with which students were approaching certain subjects. A 1944 summative document concluded, "The image of schoolchildren and their teacher, solving

⁶⁶ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, 94, l. 14.

⁶⁷ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, l. 18; TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 103, l. 86.

⁶⁸ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, l. 19; TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 108, l. 1.

math problems in a bomb shelter accompanied by the rumbling of shells, is one of the most sublime images in all of history.”⁶⁹ But whereas in the 1944 report education was the last element of the document, in a report on the war written in 1951 it is the first topic of discussion. Students were credited with outrageously high attendance rates – 99 percent in Kazan in 1942-43! – and similarly astronomical passing rates.⁷⁰ By the 1950s, academic success and discipline were touted as signs of “genuine Soviet patriotism.”⁷¹ This signaled the gradual demobilization of the Young Pioneers. By the mid-1950s, major annual campaigns among the Pioneers focused on good manners, etiquette, and hygiene, an enormous shift away from the hyperactive, martial campaigns of the 1940s.

Upon reading postwar accounts of children and the Great Patriotic War, it seems evident that the Young Pioneers’ campaign to restore their position as leaders among children was successful. Pioneers regularly appeared (and continue to appear) in postwar narratives about the war, leading by example in the classroom, in agitational work, in agricultural work, in the collection of goods, in the timurite movement, and in physical-military training exercises.⁷² Pioneer-heroes such as Marat Kazei, Lyonya Golikov, and Valya Kotik loom large in the

⁶⁹ TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 7, d. 94, l. 32.

⁷⁰ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 330, 149.

⁷¹ RGASPI f. M-1, op. 7, d. 330, l. 148.

⁷² See, for examples, Alla Sukhova, *Deti voini* (Moskva: Izdatel’skii dom “Zvonitsa-MG”, 2004), 5; G. Solodnikov, *Na marshe – vnuki Il’icha: stranitsii iz istorii Permskoi oblastnoi pionerskoi organizatsii* (Perm’: Permskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1972); T.A. Kutsenko, *The All-Union Lenin Young Pioneer Organization and Its Role in the System of Communist Education*, presented at the International Meeting “The October and Children” Devoted to the 50th Anniversary of the Great October Revolution, Moscow, 1967.

history of the children's war, even though their stories were unknown during the war itself.⁷³

By the 1960s, histories of the organization lauded the “mass heroism” of the Pioneers, noting the 15,000 children received medals “For the Defense of Leningrad” and 20,000 children were awarded medals “For the Defense of Moscow.”⁷⁴ Pioneers of the 1960s were characterized as continuing the traditions of their predecessors, Pioneers who had led timur teams, supported the military, and organized work among children in the war era. A series of lectures for Komsomoltsy on the acts of Pioneers during the Great Patriotic War from the 1970s asserted that the Pioneers took charge of children “early in the war” and led them in agricultural duties and timurite activities.⁷⁵ A regional work that itemized various contributions of local children to the war effort included a section entitled “The Archives Speak.” After noting that newly-available archival documents concerning the Great Patriotic War affirmed children's significant participation in war work, the account listed several examples, all of which specifically mentioned Pioneer troop activity or individual Pioneer accomplishments. Thus, the Pioneer organization led the mobilization of children from the war's beginning.⁷⁶ Accounts from the 1980s emphasized that children, “following the instructions of the Communists and the underground Komsomol organizations,”

⁷³ Furin, *The World of Young Pioneers*, 64-69.

⁷⁴ Kutsenko, “The All-Union Young Pioneer Organization”, 10.

⁷⁵ Nikolaev, *Pionerskoi organizatiia v gody*, 3.

⁷⁶ Solodnikov, *Na marshe*, 111-112, 115.

engaged in partisan activities and contributed to the people's victory through hospital work, participation in anti-fascist organizations, schoolwork and agricultural work. Not only did Pioneer houses and palaces remain open and functional throughout the war, but new young naturalist stations, art schools, and technical stations were opened for Pioneer members.⁷⁷ A two-volume collection of documents, published in the 1990s by the Center for the Preservation of Documents of Youth Organizations, focused solely on individual or collective contributions of children in a wide variety of active, positive roles, as reported in war-era newspaper articles, children's letters, or school reports.⁷⁸ Most of the documents in the collection identify the children as Young Pioneers, and the vast majority date to the post-crisis period. A 2004 Russian collection of accounts of children and the Great Patriotic War alleged that, "wherever children spent their wartime childhoods, they piously protected their red scarves," promulgating the myth of universal Pioneer membership and leadership of children during the war.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Furin, *The World of Young Pioneers*, 50-53; *Iz istorii stanovleniia i razvitiia detskogo kommunisticheskogo dvizheniia v SSSR: sbornik nauchnykh trudov* (Moskva: vysshaia komsomol'skaia shkola pri TsK VLKSM, 1985), 99-105.

⁷⁸ *Po obe storony fronta . . . molodezh' v velikoi otechestvennoi voine: sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, ch. 1 (Moskva: Tsentr Khreneniia Dokumentov Molodezhnykh Organizatsii Rossiskaia Gosudarstvennaia yunosheskaia biblioteka, 1994), and *Po obe storony fronta . . . molodezh' v velikoi otechestvennoi voine: sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, ch. 2 (Moskva: Tsentr Khreneniia Dokumentov Molodezhnykh Organizatsii Rossiskaia Gosudarstvennaia yunosheskaia biblioteka, 1995).

⁷⁹ Sukhova, *Deti voiny*, 5.

No hint of a crisis within the Young Pioneer organization, even in the most recent of works on children and war, exists in postwar literature. The Komsomol leadership of the Young Pioneers did a sensational public relations job over the course of the war and beyond, concealing the fact that the ailing, irrelevant children's organization almost collapsed in the early years of the Great Patriotic War. Drawing inspiration from children themselves, the Young Pioneers managed to reassert their right to prescribe behaviors and values to children, thus assuring themselves an irrevocable position in the history of the Soviet people's war effort. Pioneer leadership became an assumption, a fact beyond questioning, in postwar works on children and the war. All things considered, this was clearly a lasting victory for the Young Pioneer organization. The role of vanguard among children, so critical to the Pioneers' legacy, had been restored.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

. . . it is our duty to guide these activities . . . if we desire to be the 'vanguard.'

Vladimir Lenin, "What Is to Be Done?," 1902¹

Around the turn of the last century, Vladimir Lenin penned the brief but momentous polemic entitled "What Is to Be Done?" His vision of a small, secretive party of full-time, professional revolutionaries would shape the Bolshevik Party and forever divide the Russian socialist movement. Workers, Lenin claimed, were limited in their scope and imagination. Simple trade union consciousness would not – could not – create the conditions needed to overthrow existing bourgeois society via a socialist revolution. A small, dedicated band of revolutionaries, then, was needed to lead the working class to places it would never go of its own accord. Lenin's Bolshevik Party proposed itself as the organization necessary to the ushering in of socialism. As the vanguard of the working class, it claimed the right to instruct, represent, and speak for the proletariat.

After the revolution of 1917, Lenin and the Bolsheviks continued to act "on behalf of" the working class, but it became increasingly clear that the workers

¹ Vladimir Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?" (International Publishers Company, Inc., 1929), in V. I. Lenin, *Essential Works of Lenin: "What Is to Be Done?" and Other Writings*, ed., Henry M. Christman (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1987), 117.

needed to be taught a Soviet social, economic, and political system. Nothing inherently suited them to lead an international workers' revolution, to run factories themselves, or to build a new nation. The Party took the leading role in dictating what a workers' state ought to be and what the new Soviet man ought to look and act like. Among children, the Young Pioneer organization was to fulfill this same function as vanguard – as educator, trainer, tutor, and coach in the nascent Soviet socialist society.

For two decades after its inception, the Young Pioneers attempted to direct and shape the lives of increasing numbers of Soviet children through meetings, activities, play, and ritual. As the membership grew, so did the reach of the organization. The Pioneers introduced children, at a young age, to political rhetoric, the socialist struggle, and basic Party ideology. The Young Pioneers encouraged generations of children to venerate Lenin, to eschew the Church, to delight in spectacle, and to value education. For some children, ideas such as these contradicted centuries of family and community tradition. As the arm of the Party charged with indoctrinating children, the Young Pioneers prescribed a new set of values, loyalties, and behaviors, using a variety of means. The point of Pavlik Morozov's canonization was to persuade children to regard allegiance to the state as more important than devotion to family. Joseph Stalin's elevation and ubiquity was designed to advance his position as the provider of happy childhood

for all youngsters. The Young Pioneer organization's primary role was to dictate state expectations and priorities to the youngest of Soviet citizens.

As far as the Young Pioneers and children were concerned, the conflict in Europe, Africa, and Asia which began in 1937 was a distant fight barely relevant to and receiving scant attention in Pioneer media. When the war came home, so to speak, the organization was ill-prepared. The abstract militarization of the previous decades was not up to the task of practical application in 1941. Once the war began, the organization foundered: its local leadership evaporated, children were swept up in the chaos of war, and the center remained mute.

Recognizing the gravity of the Pioneers' situation, in the fall of 1942 the Komsomol leadership of the Young Pioneers proposed immediate steps to revive the ailing organization's reputation and visibility. The subsequent frenzy of drives, fronts, campaigns, and propaganda resulted in reports of increased activity, expressed in the newly-reinvented, belligerent, patriotic language promoted by the Pioneers. All children's activities, from manual labor to studying, were legitimized by the Pioneer organization as war work. By mid-1943, the organization was already crafting its post-war historical legacy, glossing over any mention of internal crisis and highlighting the contributions of its members to the victorious Soviet effort. The role as vanguard restored, however superficially, the Young Pioneers successfully positioned themselves to receive credit for any acts of heroism or devotion performed by children. Thus, the postwar narrative in the

Soviet Union (and in post-Soviet Russia) regarding children's contributions to the war, though typically brief, assumes Pioneer leadership.

The means by which the Pioneer organization saved itself provides a unique opportunity to understand "the people's war" from another angle – that of children. The Komsomol leadership of the Young Pioneers recognized that the organization had to become responsive to its target audience; therefore, the language and activities of the Pioneer organization were updated to convey relevance to and an urgency concerning the national context. With the exception of the Red Pathfinder initiative, the charge to Pioneers to memorialize and caretake the graves of war dead, the Pioneers suggested no original responsibilities for its members to undertake. Children were already performing tasks such as agricultural work, collection of various items, and creation of gifts for soldiers. That the Pioneers were able to tap into a preexisting resource – popular childhood emotions, experiences, desires – and coopt them for their own purposes in part explains the success of the Pioneers' efforts.

Further, it is important to understand that Soviet children participated in the war effort in significant, unique, and creative ways. A major contribution of this dissertation is the revelation of the ways in which and extent to which children provided labor, boosted morale, collected needed items, and generally supported the Soviet war effort. The contribution of Soviet children to the homefront heretofore has not been fully described or appreciated. Though the

efforts of children may not have been a decisive factor in the Soviet Union's victory, this contribution is nonetheless significant, if for no other reason than the impact of that sense of ownership of the Soviet victory felt by children who took part. That feeling of inclusion and consequence may have influenced the future attitudes and actions of these children, a group which, of all the Soviet population, claimed the largest survival rate in the nation. The impact of "owning the victory" on this particular generation, on their support for the regime, on their views of the West, and on their memories of the war, deserves further exploration.

The Young Pioneers' use of children's practices, acts, and responsibilities for their own purposes of self-preservation does not diminish their role or the importance of that role. In fact, the Pioneers' validation of multi-faceted, purposeful acts and expressions of children, by way of their comeback campaign and subsequent reporting of it, greatly complicated the simple image of the child conveyed by the state to the rest of the Soviet population. In visual propaganda for the adult audience, children are overwhelmingly – almost exclusively – portrayed as victims of enemy abuse or the horrors of war. Rejecting the one-dimensional depiction of the child-as-victim, the Pioneer organization opted instead for a multi-dimensional representation of the ideal child. They had to: the organization needed *every* positive role that children played to count towards the Pioneers' revival in the public sphere and legacy in the postwar era. And by adopting and endorsing said activities and attitudes, the Pioneers' actions confirm

that children enjoyed agency far greater than previously assumed. If children were not solely victims, passive and preyed upon, then they must have been actors, albeit in a variety of ways. And if, especially in the early years of the war, the Pioneers were not directing children's acts from Moscow, then this direction was emanating from other sources, including the children themselves. Children, then, initiated and engaged in a variety of active roles based on many motivations. It was this very multiplicity that benefitted the Young Pioneers in their drive to assert leadership of Soviet children.

Not only could the Pioneers "claim" all children via one activity or another, but the diversity of inspirations and emotions among children meant that the values of heroism advanced by the organization had multiple opportunities to resonate with its audience. This, despite the fact that the heroic ideals thrust upon Soviet children required attitudes beyond their years. The canonization of labor, self-sacrifice, hatred for the enemy, and Party loyalty were meticulously illustrated and described for children by the Pioneer organization using mature images and stories. No effort was made to shield children from the horrors of war; in fact, the war's brutality was repeatedly emphasized as the reason for children to act or think in the ways the Pioneers suggested. This dissertation makes clear that in spite of the state's longtime claim to protect children and their

childhood,² the Pioneer organization did little to soften the reality of war or to safeguard the innocence of Soviet children. In order to advance their own agenda, the organization expected attitudes of children that were more appropriate to adults. To be sure, the Komsomol leadership of the Pioneers believed that this type of adult-like belligerence would attract children to the organization. Based on observation, children yearned for action and responsibility. This responsiveness to the population, even if necessitated by internal crisis, presents one more in the long line of challenges to the traditional totalitarian characterization of the Soviet state.

The Young Pioneers' actions during the war mark it as unique among Soviet institutions. Temporally, the revival of the Pioneer organization appears to mirror the dramatic post-Stalingrad upsurge in praise of Stalin and the Party leadership. There are, however, significant differences in the experience of the Pioneers. Though the war and its immediate misfortunes created an anxiety of sorts for the Party's leadership in the Soviet Union, no other organization encountered the sort of near-death experience that the Young Pioneers faced. Nor

² Consider the "Thank You, Comrade Stalin, for Our Happy Childhood!" campaign of the 1930s. A wealth of fellow-traveler accounts attest to the state's alleged sheltering and nurturing of Soviet children. See, for example, Ethel Mannin, "Playtime of the Child in Modern Russia," in Hubert Freeling Griffith, ed., *Playtime in Russia* (London: Methuen Press, 1935), 136. Mannin writes, "It is safe to assert without qualification that in no country in the world today is the child so intelligently cared for as in the U.S.S.R. During a recent visit to Moscow I was frequently astonished at the amount of trouble taken to secure the child's well-being, to protect not merely its health but its happiness."

did any other Soviet institution so evidently follow the lead of its own constituents in advocating specific types of war work, attitudes, and language.

The adoption of Pioneer language, as seen in reports submitted by children to Moscow and contemporary oral histories,³ suggests that the organization achieved a degree of success in internalizing Pioneer rhetoric, primarily by correctly identifying and tapping into children's desires. This conclusion follows other studies which note a long tradition of Party efforts to educate the population in "state-speech."⁴ Though this dissertation is not about reception of the state's expectations, an obvious complement would be such a companion study. Now that this project has presented the view from the center, a companion study which evaluates these measures from the provincial or local level would be invaluable. Such a future study could reveal the extent to which the Young Pioneers were successful in internalizing speech, motives, and activities among children, and more interestingly, reveal the extent to which the state's messages were adopted, manipulated, reinterpreted, and modified by local officials, teachers, and children, for tantalizing snatches of this sort of appropriation exist in memoirs.⁵ (Any

³ Larry E. Holmes, *Stalin's School*.

⁴ See, for example, Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), and Lisa Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades*.

⁵ Children could use war work for their own purposes. Vera Inber recalls that one small boy in Leningrad explained to her that he had made an unsatisfactory grade in math "because of an incendiary bomb." And, it seems clear that despite the intense hostility for the enemy advocated by the state, children were capable of distinguishing between "the enemy" and the German people. Svetlana Magayeva recounts a conversation amongst children about the proper response towards the enemy after a friend is killed in the war. The children decided that all German children in Berlin should be rescued and moved to a Young Pioneer camp in the Soviet Union, and *then*

defiance of the Pioneer message would take on added interest in that those spontaneous subcultures would not only be construed as anti-Party, but treasonous.) For children, especially, were allowed plenty of room to maneuver within the broad definition of acceptable activities and motivations presented by the Young Pioneers.

A broader question raised by this project is of a comparative nature. The mobilization of youth, made possible by modern technology and nurtured by various ideologies, is considered a characteristic common to modern totalitarian states and societies.⁶ The context of World War II, specifically, provides fodder for a productive comparison of youth and children's state organizations. The Hitler Youth, for example, attempted "total mobilization of youth" as "bearers of the future world" in Germany.⁷ Numerous scholarly (and non-scholarly) studies of the Nazi organization exist. This dissertation offers, for the first time, a starting point for a comparative study of the Hitler Youth (or any other totalitarian children's organization) and the Young Pioneers, in terms of an institutional history, the relationship between state and child in war, and the influence of ideology on state expectations in time of war. Such studies promise to more fully illuminate the role of the child in modern war, the state-child relationship in authoritarian nations, and the layered meanings of state-sponsored youth culture.

Berlin could be bombed in retaliation. Inber, *Leningrad Diary*, 129; Magayeva, *Surviving the Blockade*, 43-44.

⁶ See, for example, Peter Stearns, *Growing Up*.

⁷ Wallace and Alt, "Youth Cultures Under Authoritarian Regimes," 278-279.

A final set of questions suggested by this dissertation involves memory of the war. The study of children and war cannot be separated from the state's efforts to influence memory of the war. The postwar narratives created and popularized by the Young Pioneers suggest early efforts by the organization to shape the memories of those who were children during the war. These narratives offered children a version of the war that was almost entirely laudatory of children's actions, with the only major amendment being the leadership role of the Pioneers during the war. They certainly attempted to help those who were children during the war to identify with the "victorious Soviet people" so often praised in the postwar era. Limited evidence, presented here, intimates that children recalled their contributions as part of a larger whole, as part of society's contribution to the homefront, as part of the Stalinist, socialist nation, but the Pioneers themselves are not a major part of memoirs of those who were children during the war.⁸ To what degree was Pioneer leadership "remembered" by those who were children during the war, after the war was over? If little recognition

⁸ Janka Goldberger is the only of the memoirists who specifically discusses her entrance into the Pioneer organization. Her remembrance of the fall of 1943: "That year we were officially enrolled into the Pioneers, and each one of us was given a red scarf to wear round our necks. Nobody was asked if they wanted to join. Everybody had to. It was something like compulsory scouts, except that we had to listen to speeches telling us how Father Stalin had looked, does look, and will look after us, and how we all owe him a debt of eternal gratitude." Goldberger's experience fits with the resurrection of the Pioneers described in this dissertation considering the sudden interest in increasing membership and the revival of the red scarf. Interestingly, Goldberger was a Polish deportee living in exile in Central Asia – not exactly the target audience of the Pioneer organization. Other memoirists refer to the Pioneer organization in more oblique terms. Shavrova, for example, recalls going to a Pioneer Palace in Leningrad in the summer of 1942 to join a needlework group. Goldberger, *Stalin's Little Guest*, 140; Shavrova, "A Schoolgirl's Diary," in Simmons and Perlina, *Writing the Siege*, 43.

exists, then the effects of the disparity between the Pioneer war narrative and reality on memories of the Great Patriotic War deserve further exploration.

The emphasis on military preparedness training and belligerency during the war, described in this study, must have had future implications for children. One wonders at the effects of these actions and attitudes: how does it affect Pioneer members? how does it affect the ways in which these children remembered or regarded the Young Pioneer organization? how does it affect this generation's attitudes towards future wars? The legacy of militarization within the Pioneer organization extended beyond the 1940s, though considerably softened by demobilization efforts. Paul Thorez noted that the shot put event at the famous Young Pioneer camp, Artek, in the early 1950s used a weight shaped like a hand grenade.⁹ More broadly, one wonders how the expectation that children should engage in adult behaviors and attitudes carried over into post-war era. Did the Pioneer organization ever attempt to reinstate traditional ideas about childhood for its members? By what means and for what reasons? The question of memory is a significant part of understanding the total war experience for the former Soviet Union, and this dissertation provides many of the themes by which the issues may be productively framed.

For our perception of the Soviet experience in the Great Patriotic War to be complete, children must be written into the story of the war. Very few

⁹ Thorez, *Model Children*, 57.

interactions between state and society during war did not involve them in some manner. The crisis in the Young Pioneer organization provides us with a unique opportunity to reveal the actions and attitudes of this significant subpopulation, the state's expectations of children during the war, and the institutional machinations required to restore the Pioneers to their rightful place as leader of Soviet children. In the end, the crisis was averted. Fortunately for the Party, wartime campaigns reinstated the Young Pioneers as vanguard among children and secured the organization's place in the history of the glorious Soviet war effort.

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